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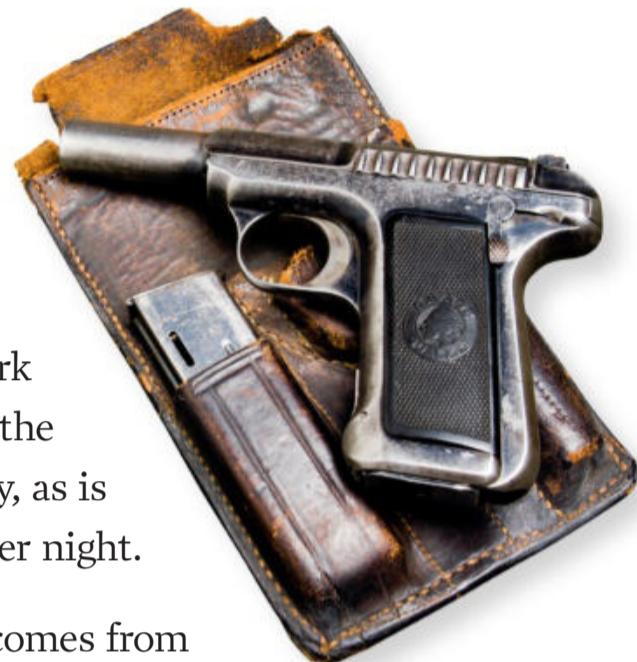
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## This is not the gun

that killed Grigory Rasputin, but it does look a lot like one believed to be involved in his murder. At least two others were fired on a dark December night in 1916 when he died. Today, the whereabouts of all three firearms are a mystery, as is the truth about what happened that cold winter night.

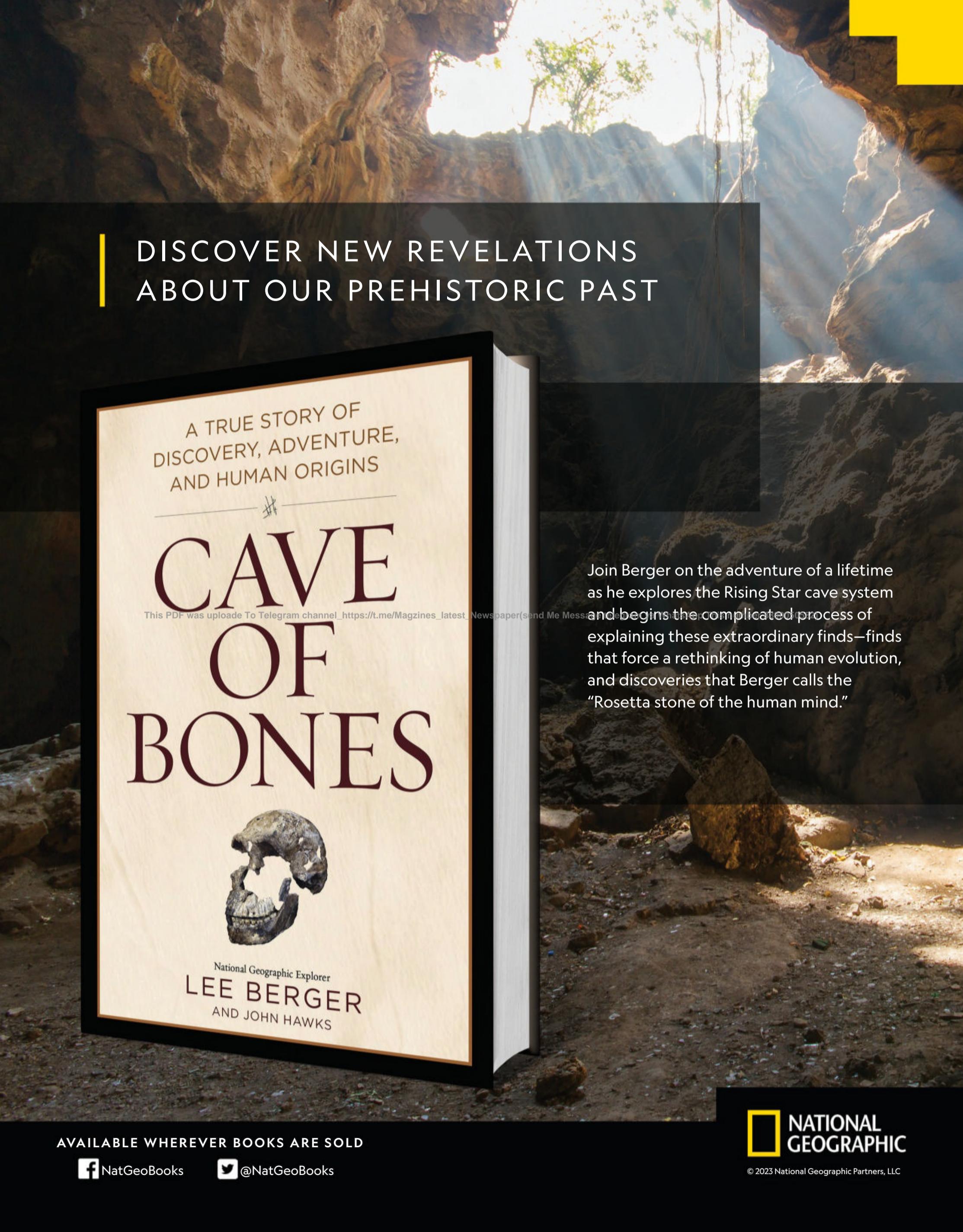


The best known account of Rasputin's death comes from one of his murderers, Prince Felix Yusupov. It's a fantastic tale, depicting Rasputin as impervious to cyanide, bullets, and beatings. In 1983 Ukrainian American actor Jack Palance dressed as the Russian prince and delivered Yusupov's account during an episode of *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* In his signature raspy voice, Palance made Yusupov's story seem like the absolute truth. I was ready to believe it.

But now I am not. Yusupov's writing has an undeniable flair for the dramatic, which makes him a very entertaining but terribly unreliable narrator. Another complication: Many documents, including the official autopsy, went missing in the chaos of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Corroborating Yusupov's fantastic narrative has become difficult, if not impossible.

Incomplete records, missing documents, and flawed testimonies: Historians run into these problems all the time and must do the painstaking work of filling in the gaps as best they can. But sometimes those gaps just can't be filled definitively. And we must choose to believe it, or not.

  
Amy E. Briggs, Editor in Chief



DISCOVER NEW REVELATIONS  
ABOUT OUR PREHISTORIC PAST

A TRUE STORY OF  
DISCOVERY, ADVENTURE,  
AND HUMAN ORIGINS

# CAVE OF BONES

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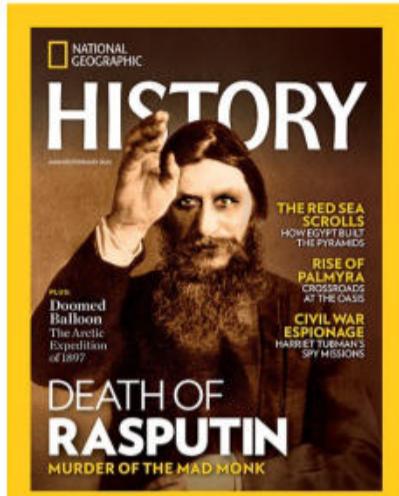
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GRIGORY RASPUTIN IN AN UNDATED  
PHOTOGRAPH

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# HISTORY

VOL. 9 NO. 6

**FALLEN GLORY**

Photographed before ISIS destroyed it in 2015, Palmyra's monumental arch was built during the oasis city's third-century A.D. heyday.

**Features**

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Revered by the tsarina and reviled by the nobles, Rasputin failed to see the murderous forces swirling around him in December 1916.



**Harriet Tubman**, ca 1868  
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

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Found in China, the oldest saddle yet discovered overturns assumptions about who was doing the riding: Its owner was not a male soldier, but a female herder.

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In the 1800s leech mania almost drove the creatures to extinction, as they were touted all over Europe as a miracle cure for scores of sicknesses.

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An ancient Assyrian capital, Assur was often overlooked by scholars until the early 1900s, when archaeologist Walter Andrae revealed the splendor of its remains.



## HARBOR HOPPING *New England Cruises*

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**Buried with a saddle and riding clothes,** a female skeleton found in a grave at the Yanghai cemetery likely lived as a herdswoman some 2,700 years ago.

PATRICK WERTMANN



**THE SADDLE** was found in a burial at the Iron Age Yanghai cemetery located in the Turpan district of Xinjiang, in an arid zone of northwestern China. The Yanghai were a sedentary people who used horses to herd sheep and goats.

NG MAPS

#### TRAILBLAZING SADDLES

## Ancient Chinese Saddle Surprises Archaeologists

A horsewoman's leather saddle, buried in China thousands of years ago, overturns assumptions that horseback riding was only for military men.

**A**s early as 2,700 years ago, a herdswoman who lived in the arid stretches of northwest China was buried in a coat made of animal hides, woolen pants, and leather boots. Dressed to ride, she was also buried with her leather saddle.

Found in the Yanghai cemetery near Turpan and dated to

between 700 and 400 B.C., this saddle, the oldest yet found, challenges assumptions about who was using such gear, and for what purpose.

The find was "a surprise," according to Patrick Wertmann of the University of Zurich, lead author of a study of the saddle, published in *Archaeological Research in Asia*. Saddle finds are rare, as their

organic components often decay. Other kinds of horse gear, such as bridles and bits, are more commonly found, but they do not necessarily indicate saddle usage.

Until the Yanghai find, the oldest known saddles belonged to the Pazyryk culture, centered on the Altay area of Kazakhstan and Russia to the north of Yanghai and Turpan.



Although the Pazyryk saddles have been indirectly dated to the fifth century B.C., Wertmann considers that the Pazyryk culture had pioneered saddle use centuries earlier.

“Horse riding was probably introduced to northwest China from the [Pazyryk] region, and it’s possible that saddles also arrived that way,” he told *History*. However, until such earlier specimens are found (or the fifth-century B.C. saddles are redated and found to be older), the Yanghai saddle is considered to be the world’s oldest yet recovered.

#### Comfortable Seat

Preserved by the region’s arid

climate, the Yanghai saddle offers rich insights into early horse-riding technology and the society that created it. Its two wing-shaped hides, filled with a mixture of straw, deer hair, and camel hair, were sewn together along the outer edges and separated by a section without stuffing (known as the gullet), which eased the pressure on the horse’s spine.

The emergence of such designs reveals “the increasing care about the comfort and safety of the rider, and the health of the horse,” said Wertmann. Greater comfort made it possible to travel longer distances, increasing interaction with different people. “Unlike

## SCULPTURES WITH SADDLES AND STIRRUPS

**HORSES AND RIDERS** are popular subjects in ancient Chinese art. Two of the oldest are bronze horses from 1191–1148 B.C., wearing simple mats rather than saddles. A bronze mirror dating from 770 to 256 B.C. features a decorative rider on a horse with a saddle similar to the one found at Yanghai. The saddles on the famous Qin dynasty terra-cotta cavalry horses (246 to 208 B.C.) are more sophisticated, resembling Scythian design. Perhaps the most famous—and colorful—are the figurines made during the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907). By this time, saddle blankets and stirrups often appear, as shown in this image.

HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY



the younger finds from the elite Scythian burials, this early saddle was made from inexpensive materials and used by a common woman,” Wertmann’s study notes. “Yet it is testimony to the same mastery of craftsmanship.”

When people began to ride horses and when they began to use saddles are much debated topics. One study suggests horseback riding originated in what is today Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary around 3000 B.C. In the centuries

before the saddle emerged, horse riders rode bareback or sat on mats or blankets.

The Yanghai saddle also shakes assumptions that horse-riding saddles were used solely by men for military purposes. “The discovery of this saddle inside the tomb of a woman suggests that women participated in the everyday activities of mounted pastoralists, which included herding and traveling,” said Wertmann. ■

—Braden Phillips

# Dr. Charles Drew: Father of the Blood Bank

A Black surgeon and researcher pioneered new ways to process and store blood, saving countless lives during World War II and leading to the creation of a national blood bank.

## Innovation and Service

**1904**

The oldest of five children, Charles Drew is born on June 3 in Washington, D.C., to Richard and Nora Drew.

**1933**

Drew graduates second in his class from McGill University Faculty of Medicine in Montréal, Canada.

**1938**

At Columbia University in New York, Drew writes his doctoral thesis, which will lay the foundation for modern blood banks.

**1941**

Drew becomes head of the American Red Cross Blood Bank. He invents the first mobile donation stations, or bloodmobiles.

**1950**

Driving to a medical conference, Drew is fatally injured in a car accident and dies near Burlington, North Carolina.

In the late 1930s, people could donate blood, but very few hospitals could store it for later use. Whole blood breaks down quickly, and there were no protocols at the time for safely preserving it. As a result, hospitals often did not have the appropriate blood type when patients needed it. Charles Drew, a Black surgeon and researcher, helped solve this monumental problem for medicine, earning him the title “Father of the Blood Bank.”

In 1938, while obtaining his doctorate in medicine, Drew became a fellow at Columbia University’s prestigious Presbyterian Hospital in New York. He studied the storage and distribution of blood, including the separation of its components, and applied his findings to an experimental blood bank at the hospital. His revolutionary work led to the discovery of methods for safely and effectively processing and preserving blood and his recommendation that hospitals create their own blood banks.

Drew then directed the Blood for Britain campaign in 1940, which successfully sent much needed blood plasma, the portion of

blood that contains no cells and lasts longer, overseas. Shortly after, as the United States prepared to enter World War II, he drew on that experience to organize what became the first U.S. national blood bank. His discoveries and his leadership saved countless lives.

## Path to Medicine

Drew was born on June 3, 1904, in segregated Washington, D.C., to middle-class parents who stressed education and responsibility. The oldest of five children, Drew showed maturity and ingenuity at an early age. At 12, he was selling newspapers from a street corner. By 13, he had six newspaper boys working for him.

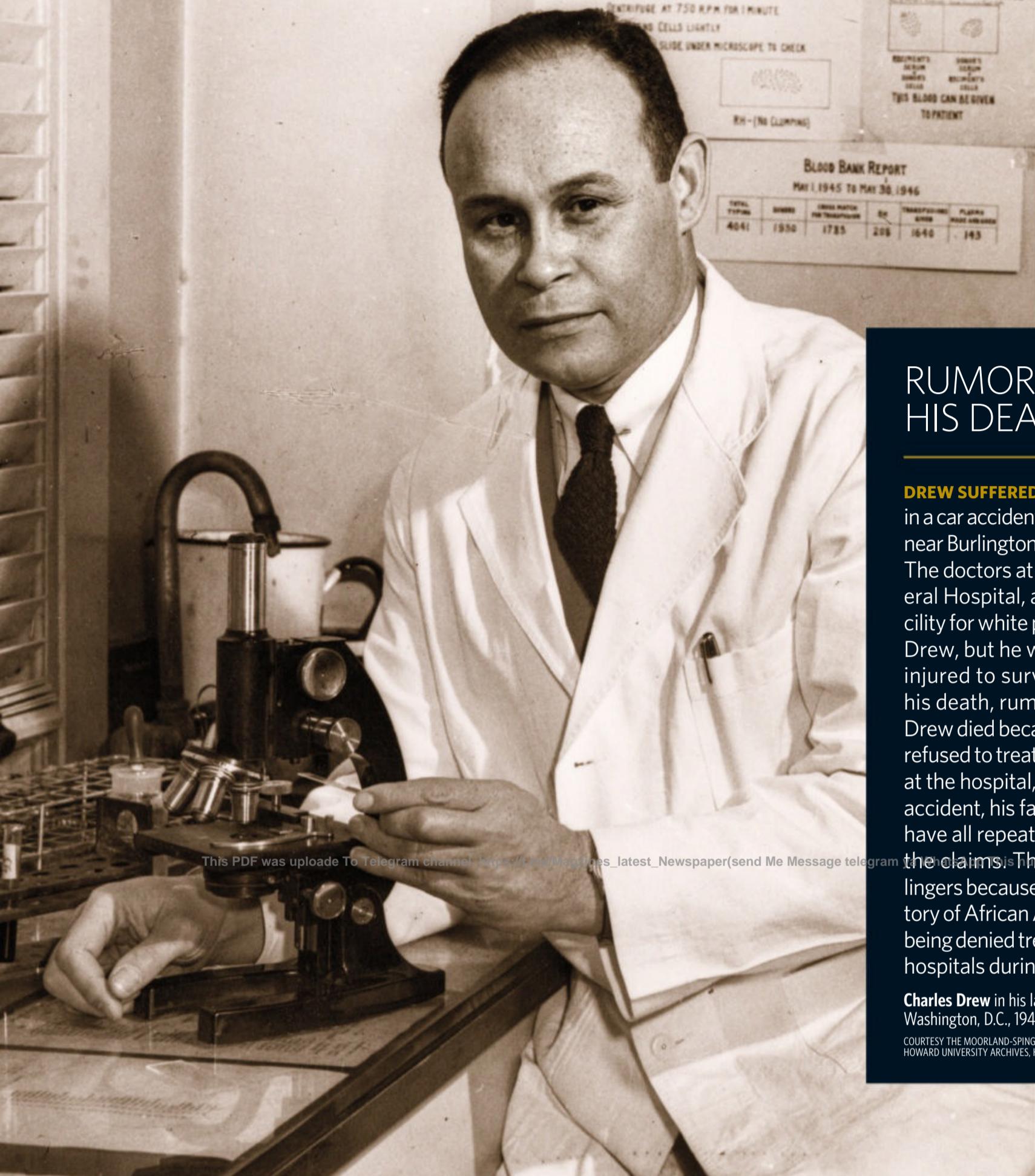
He attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, a nationally recognized Black high school in the city. He was considered bright, but he excelled more in athletics than in schoolwork, lettering in four sports.

After graduating in 1922, he attended Amherst College in Massachusetts on an athletic scholarship, where he was one of only 13 Black students in a class of 600. He and his Black teammates routinely faced hostility from opposing teams and were refused service at

*“On the battlefields nobody is very interested in where the plasma comes from when they are hurt.”*  
—Charles Drew

**Wartime poster** produced in 1945 by the American Red Cross  
BILL WATERSON/ALAMY





## RUMORS OF HIS DEATH

**DREW SUFFERED** serious injuries in a car accident on April 1, 1950, near Burlington, North Carolina. The doctors at Alamance General Hospital, a segregated facility for white people, cared for Drew, but he was too severely injured to survive. Soon after his death, rumors spread that Drew died because the hospital refused to treat him. Witnesses at the hospital, survivors of the accident, his family, and others have all repeatedly discredited the claims. The urban legend lingers because there was a history of African Americans often being denied treatment at white hospitals during this era.

**Charles Drew** in his lab at Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1945

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restaurants when they traveled for games. Drew was also denied captainship of the football team in his senior year because of his race, even though he was the school's best athlete.

As an undergraduate, Drew became interested in medicine and was encouraged by a biology professor to pursue it. By the time Drew graduated in 1926, he knew he wanted to attend medical school. To afford it, he worked for the next two years as an athletic director and a biology and chemistry teacher at Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland.

When choosing a medical school, race limited Drew's options. Most Black medical students at the time attended either Howard University in Washington, D.C., or Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. Drew was rejected from his first choice, Howard, and accepted but deferred from Harvard University, which only took a few non-white students each year. Anxious to begin, Drew decided to attend McGill University's Faculty of Medicine in Montréal, Canada. In 1933 he graduated second in his class of 137 students.

## Transfusion Medicine

After graduation, Drew took an internship and surgical residency at Montréal General Hospital, where his interest in transfusion medicine was born. Blood transfusions had only become widely used 30 years earlier with the discovery of the four basic groups of blood type antigens: A, B, AB, and O.

Drew returned to Washington, D.C., and taught pathology at Howard University College of Medicine. He was also a surgical instructor and chief surgical resident at Freedmen's Hospital.



In 1938 Drew began postgraduate work at New York's Columbia University, and he was awarded a prestigious fellowship at Presbyterian Hospital. He studied under John Scudder, who had been granted funding to set up an experimental blood bank to study the storage and distribution of blood.

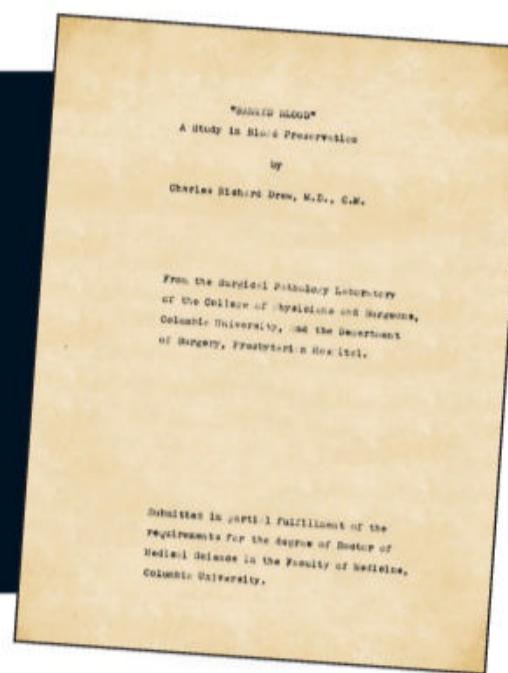
Drew's work with Scudder became the basis for his 1940 dissertation, "Banked Blood: A Study in Blood Preservation," in which he reported their findings for the long-term storage of plasma. Scudder called Drew's thesis "a masterpiece." It would form the basis of Drew's major innovations to come.

## REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

**DREW'S GROUNDBREAKING** thesis advocated for an advance that seems ordinary today. In his paper, he argued that blood banks would be so valuable to patients that they "should become a part of the hospital service."

**Title page** of Charles Drew's 1940 thesis

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## Wartime Needs

As Drew was finishing his degree at Columbia, World War II was erupting in Europe. Great Britain was asking the United States for desperately needed plasma to help victims of the Blitz. Given his expertise, Drew was selected to be the medical director for the Blood for Britain campaign.

Using Presbyterian Hospital's blood bank as a template, Drew established uniform procedures and standards for collecting blood and processing blood plasma from nine New York hospitals and sending the plasma safely overseas. The five-month campaign collected donations from 15,000 Americans and was deemed a success.

With the increasing likelihood that the nation would be drawn into war, the United States wanted to capitalize on

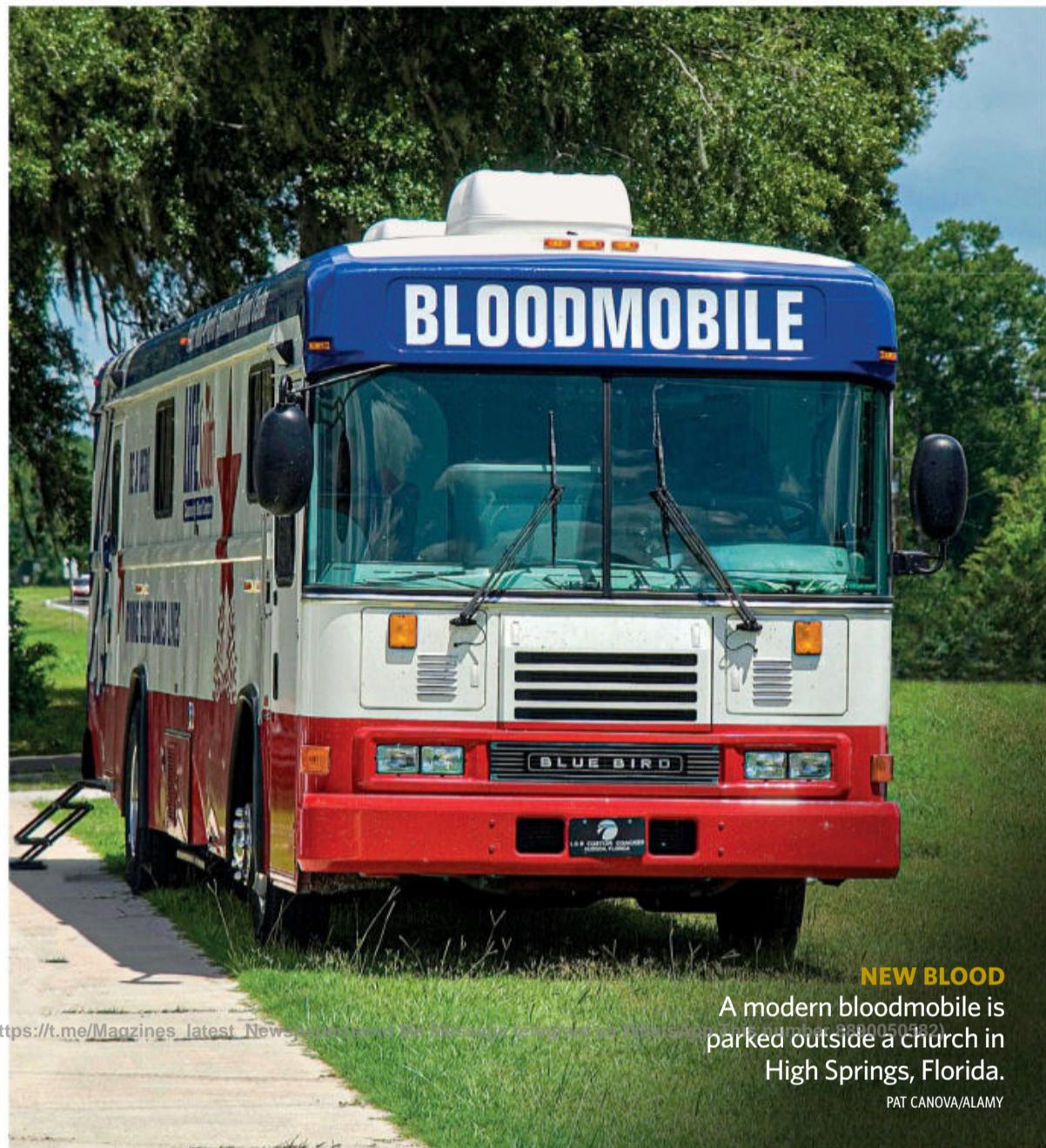
## GOING MOBILE

**DONATING BLOOD** is so easy to do now that it can happen almost anywhere, thanks to mobile donation units, better known as bloodmobiles. When Charles Drew invented them in 1941, they were called "self-contained collection centers on specially built trucks." There were 63 of them in use during World War II as part of a national blood drive. By the war's end, some 6.7 million American volunteers had donated more than 13 million pints of blood.



**Test tubes** containing samples of blood taken from donors

MOUSSA 81/GETTY



### NEW BLOOD

A modern bloodmobile is parked outside a church in High Springs, Florida.

PAT CANOVA/ALAMY

what Drew had learned from the campaign. He was recruited as the assistant director of a three-month pilot program to mass-produce dried plasma in New York, which became the model for the first Red Cross blood bank. His innovations for this program included mobile blood donation stations, later called bloodmobiles.

Ironically, Drew was initially forbidden to participate in the program he created because the U.S. military refused to allow the Red Cross to accept donations from Black Americans. After protests from the Black press and the NAACP, the policy changed in 1942 to allow Black people to donate, but it still required all blood to be segregated.

Categorizing the policy as unscientific and insulting, Drew resigned his position in 1942. "It is fundamentally wrong for any great nation to willfully

discriminate against such a large group of its people," he later said. "One can say quite truthfully that on the battlefields nobody is very interested in where the plasma comes from when they are hurt... It is unfortunate that such a worthwhile and scientific bit of work should have been hampered by such stupidity."

### Greatest Contributions

Drew returned to Howard University as chief surgeon at Freedmen's Hospital, where he mentored a new generation of medical students and residents while campaigning against the exclusion of Black doctors from local medical societies, medical specialty organizations, and the American Medical Association. He considered his training of young Black surgeons to be his greatest contribution to medicine.

Drew continued to be recognized for his achievements, but his life was tragically cut short in the early hours of April 1, 1950, when he was just 45 years old. Drew was driving to a medical conference in Alabama when he fell asleep at the wheel near Burlington, North Carolina. The car flipped several times, leaving Drew with life-threatening injuries. He was rushed to a local hospital, which had segregated wards but a shared emergency room. Three white doctors gave Drew transfusions and consulted with doctors at nearby Duke University Medical Center to try to save his life, but his injuries were too serious to overcome. In November 1950, seven months after his death, the American Red Cross announced that it would omit the racial designation once required of blood donors.

—Cate Lineberry

# Leech Mania, a Bloody Health Craze

In the 19th century, leeches were coveted in medicine, celebrated in fashion and art—and nearly driven to extinction.

**W**hen people think of market crazes, Dutch tulips or real estate come to mind. But in the 19th century demand for *Hirudo medicinalis*—the European medicinal leech—nearly drove the species to extinction. Its medicinal properties were touted as a cure-all across Europe, and the animal was used to treat everything from cancer to tuberculosis to mental illness.

The coveted worm—dark brown or black in color, with a thin stripe of yellow, green, or red along its back—was popular because it supposedly had a gentle touch, yet also, importantly, a voracious appetite.

Physicians of the period often prescribed dozens of leeches to treat what ailed a patient. Someone with

suspected pneumonia, for example, might have up to 80 leeches each

treatment session applied across the chest. For gastritis therapy, as many as 20 to 40 leeches could be prescribed. As a result, wild *Hirudo medicinalis* became increasingly scarce across its range in Europe.

## Good Medicine

Victorian-era Europeans weren't the first to look to these bloodsucking worms for succor. Leeches were used medicinally by ancient Egyptians, and later in India, Greece, and Rome. Greek physicians typically used the animals for bloodletting, to balance the humors, and also for conditions as varied as gout, fever, and hearing loss.

Leech use reached new heights in the 19th century largely because of the influence of François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, the head doctor of Val-de-Grâce in Paris. The physician declared that all ills, ranging from smallpox to cancer, were the result of inflammation, and bleeding, he said, was the



### LEECH GATHERERS

George Walker's 1814 engraving depicts rural Englishwomen harvesting medicinal leeches from a wetland to sell to doctors.

University Library, Leeds  
UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UG/BRIDGEMAN

cure. Bloodletting via leech became de rigueur because it was relatively safe and didn't require any specialized skills. And leeches have natural anticoagulants in their saliva, which helps stop bleeding once they drop off a patient.

Broussais treated his own indigestion by applying dozens of leeches, and he believed leeching could have salubrious effects on animals, too: He bled his fighting cocks weekly, though the weakened birds performed poorly. Such was the demand for leeches that from 1830 to 1836 Broussais's hospital alone used over two million of them, sometimes applying large numbers of leeches

## FANCY PHARMA

**LARGE, GILDED CERAMIC JARS** dominated the window displays of 19th-century drugstores in Europe and the United States. These ostentatious vessels advertised the pharmacist's supply of medicinal leeches. No matter how ornate the container, the lid always had holes for air to circulate to the leeches.

Leech jar, 19th-century England

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to new patients prior to any diagnosis. Other French hospitals recorded robust use during the years of peak leech popularity, too: From 1820 to 1850, some used between 5,000 and 60,000 leeches annually, according to work by Roy Sawyer, the founder of the Medical Leech Museum, in Charleston, South Carolina.

### Supply Chain

To meet demand, hospitals relied on rural workers who gathered the wild animals. Leech gatherer, unsurprisingly, was a distinctly unenviable job in the 19th century, but the work was reliable. Wading into a freshwater pond or

## The Poetry of Population Decline

**WILLIAM WORDSWORTH** was an English Romantic poet who wrote about the leech craze and the troubles it was causing the people who gathered the creatures for a living. In his 1807 poem “Resolution and Independence,” the narrator comes upon an impoverished leech gatherer who laments the hardships of his trade. He notes the growing challenges of finding the animals, even decades before the leech trade peaked:

*Once I could meet with them on every side;  
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;  
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.*

# Bloodletting Methods

**HUMANS HAVE BEEN** using bloodletting to treat illness for millennia, starting some 3,000 years ago in ancient Egypt. Early practitioners would use simple tools, like plant thorns or animal teeth, to bleed patients. Leeches were an early method, but more methods evolved. As the practice spread to Europe and Asia, double-edged blades, known as lancets, became popular. Fleams were another tool with a fixed blade that were popular in medieval Europe. They would be placed over veins and struck, quickly cutting the blood vessels. Smaller amounts could be extracted by scarification. A scraping tool ran over the skin, and dome-shaped glasses were placed over the cuts. Suction created a vacuum to extract the blood.

A 15th-century illustration from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* depicts a scene in which leeches are applied to a patient. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

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ALAMY



muddy ditch to offer up his—or often her—body as bait to parasitic worms, a leech gatherer's job was described as "employment hazardous and wearisome" by poet William Wordsworth.

Leeches were found in freshwater ponds, streams, wetlands, and ditches throughout Europe. They would sup upon the blood of many creatures: deer, horses, cattle, and humans, as well as fish, amphibians, and waterbirds.

Clamping onto their prey with three formidable jaws, each studded with about 100 teeth, leeches would often extract a tablespoon of blood before they were satiated and could then be easily detached. Repeated blood meals took a toll on beleaguered leech collectors, who endured hazards including fatigue and extreme blood loss as well as infections from organisms in the leech's gut or transmissible diseases like syphilis. There was always a risk that the animal might regurgitate previously ingested blood.

## Leech Mania

During the Victorian era, enthusiasm for leeches spread widely across Europe and also gave rise to a leech trend glorified in European fashion

and art. Leeches were embroidered on women's dresses. Apothecaries purchased elaborate, two-foot-tall ceramic containers to prominently display and house their leeches. The need to transport leeches across vast distances for transcontinental and, eventually, transatlantic journeys also inspired innovations in leech storage.

To help meet a burgeoning American demand, in 1835 a \$500 award—roughly \$17,000 in modern-day dollars—was advertised for anyone who could breed European medicinal leeches in the United States, but that venture never proved successful.

The relationships between people and their parasites also gave rise to surprising long-term bonds: British Lord Chancellor Thomas Erskine, who lived from 1750 to 1823, was so grateful to two leeches that bled him when he was extremely sick that he kept the pair as companions. Storing them in



As medicinal leeches became scarcer, artificial bloodletting kits were designed, such as this French model from 1850.

SSPL/UIG/BRIDGEMAN



### DYING TRADE

An Italian leech collector (left), known as a *mignattero*, shows his wares in this photograph from 1910.

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BRIDGEMAN/ACI

a glass, he gave them fresh water daily and named them Home and Cline after two celebrated surgeons, according to *Leech* by University of Manchester medical historians Robert Kirk and Neil Pemberton.

Despite the popularity of the European medicinal leech, it was not an ideal product for commercialization. The species only needed a blood meal every six months and didn't reach reproductive age for a couple years. Used leeches were often disposed of in ditches or ponds, where they could theoretically reproduce, but species overexploitation alongside draining and redevelopment

of marshlands for agriculture—and the likely related losses of amphibians that the leeches relied on as food staples—fueled declines.

To help save the medicinal leech from extinction, a small number of 19th-century European governments implemented some of the first ever wildlife protections, either prohibiting leech exports or regulating leech collecting. In 1848 Russia banned taking them from May to July, the prime breeding season.

Yet these actions were not enough. By the early 1900s, the medicinal leech became endangered in many locations throughout Europe, and the animal was incorrectly believed to have disappeared from Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Partly because leeches could not tamp down the cholera epidemic that ravaged Europe and the United States,

the animals eventually fell out of favor as a first-line medical treatment. Medical leech use endured for much more limited applications. In the early 20th century, the animals were sold in barber shops, recommended as a treatment for black eyes.

Today, the European medicinal leech is considered near threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Its range still extends across Europe, and alongside local collecting pressures, wetland destruction, climate change, and lack of blood meals from mammals and amphibians are considered its most pressing threats. The animal's use in modern medicine continues, particularly to assist with transplants and plastic surgery, but the animals are now often bred at laboratories in Europe and the United States.

—Dina Fine Maron

***Hirudo medicinalis***, the most common species of medicinal leech, can grow to over seven inches long.

JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARK,  
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION



**ANDRÉE AND HIS CREW** were forced to crash-land the balloon on July 14, 1897, after less than three days in flight. Nils Strindberg's haunting photograph of the wreckage reveals how large a threat the men were up against in the Arctic.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES



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# North Pole by Balloon: The Andrée Expedition

In 1897 Swedish scientist Salomon August Andrée's audacious quest to reach the North Pole by air became one of the great unresolved dramas of Arctic exploration.

**H**undreds of people tried to reach the North Pole in the 19th century, all by ship or sledge. All failed; dozens perished. But only three tried to reach the so-called Arctic Grail by balloon. They were led by Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée, who told a London audience at the Sixth International Geographical Congress in 1895 that a hydrogen balloon could succeed where other methods had not.

Andrée's critics heaped scorn on what the London magazine *Punch* called

his "balloonatic" notions. There was no way to control speed and direction, they said. Failure was inevitable. Undaunted, Andrée would take off from Sweden with two fellow explorers two years later to try to reach the pole—only to disappear. Decades would pass before the world knew of their fate.

## The Balloon Bug

Born in 1854 in the Swedish town of Gränna, Andrée grew up to be a mechanical engineer with a keen interest in aviation. In 1876, at age 22, he was

wowed at the Philadelphia World's Fair by aeronautic and balloon displays, seeding his lifelong fascination with balloon flight.

Andrée was born into a period of Arctic exploration. High-profile attempts to reach the North Pole were all the rage, yet none had been successful. In 1871 American explorer Charles Francis Hall had tried and failed to reach the North Pole aboard the ship *Polaris*. Undeterred by Hall's failure, British naval officer George Nares set out for the pole in 1875, and likewise did not make it.



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## AVOIDING DISASTER

**WHEN IT WAS INFLATED** for the first time in 1896, Andrée's balloon was leaking hydrogen gas. To make it airtight, the silk was doubled and varnished on both sides. Although no balloon had flown more than 36 hours, its maker said this balloon could stay aloft for a month. Seeing that it still leaked gas, however, an original member of the team, Nils Ekholm, backed out of the mission. He was replaced by civil engineer Knut Fraenkel.

**Workmen examine the** fabric of Andrée's balloon on Danskøya (Danes Island). MONDADORI/ALBUM

Nares's venture convinced many there was no way to sail to the North Pole.

Having caught the ballooning bug in Philadelphia, Andrée threw himself into flight, making several crossings of the Baltic Sea. These experiences paved the way to the conference speech he gave in London in 1895, when he made his much criticized proposal that the pole could be reached by balloon.

Andrée, however, had answers for every objection. His balloon would be 100 feet tall and made of double-ply silk, varnished on both sides to prevent

gas leakage, thus ensuring they could stay aloft for many days. His wicker-work "car" carried bunks for a crew of three men, three sledges, two light boats, tents, and significant provisions. He attached sails to steer, and dragropes to control altitude. His study of winds had convinced him that a steady northerly wind would take them over the North Pole to Alaska in a matter of days.

### Taking Flight

Although still regarded as reckless by many, Andrée's plan impressed Sweden's King Oscar II. Alfred Nobel, the wealthy inventor of dynamite, provided the funding, eager for his country to make a mark in Arctic exploration. Andrée's scheme attracted global attention. The press would be updated via buoys and carrier pigeons.

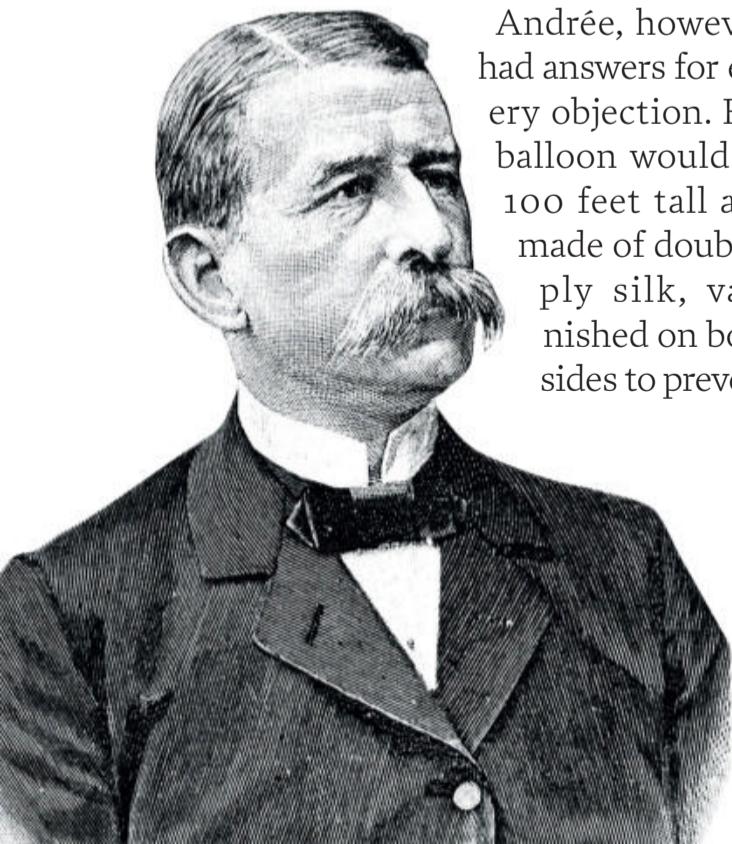
On July 11, 1897, following many frustrating delays, Andrée and his

crew—Nils Strindberg, an assistant professor of physics and photographer, and Knut Fraenkel, a civil engineer—lifted off from Danes Island, Spitsbergen, in their balloon, dubbed the *Örnen* (*Eagle*).

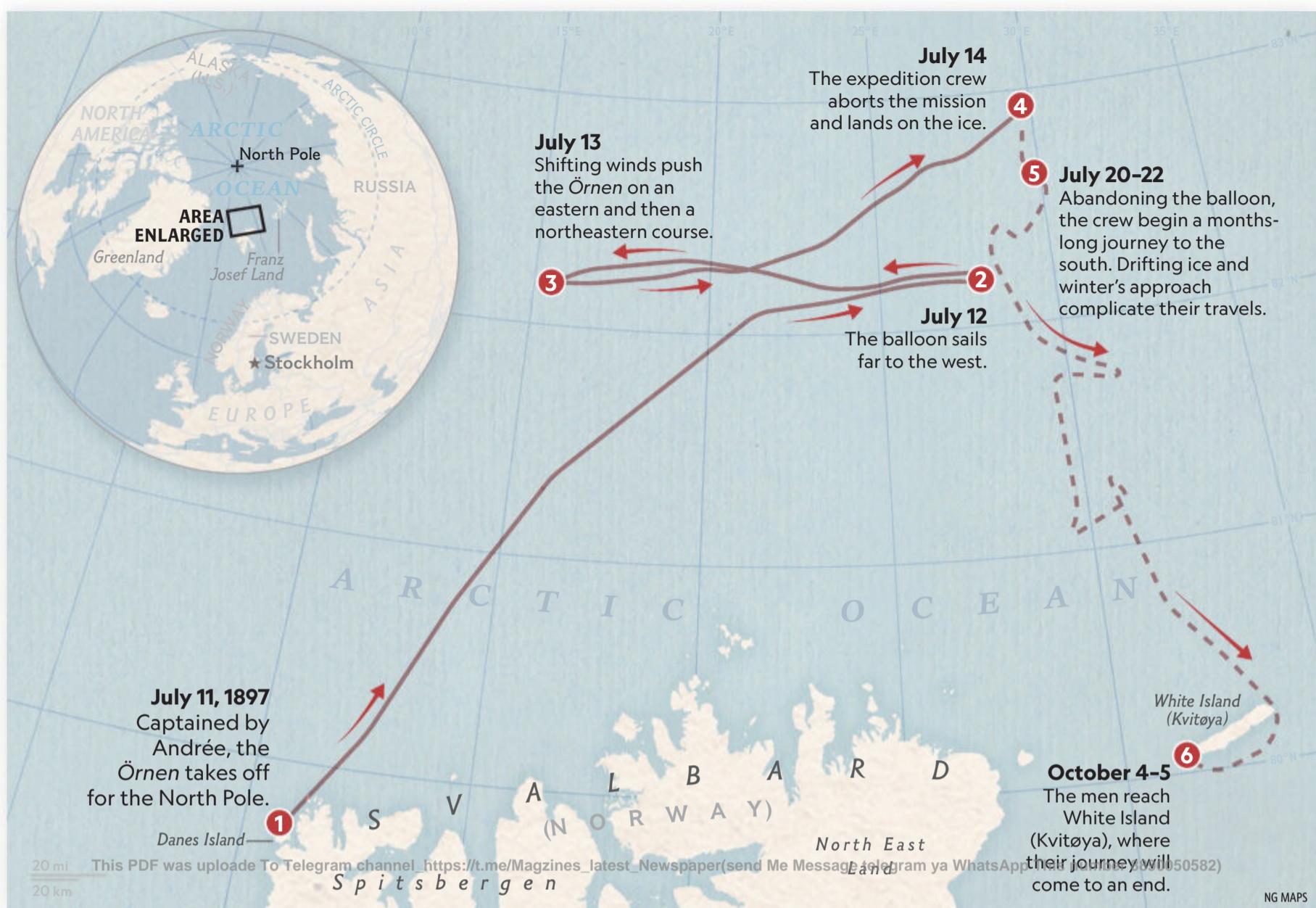
After briefly soaring above the crowd, something went wrong: Either a sudden cold current of air or the effect of the hanging dragropes caused the craft to be forced downward so sharply that the car struck the water. Onlookers screamed as Andrée released ballast. The balloon climbed and was visible for about an hour, calmly soaring away to the northeast. It was the last time the three men were ever seen alive.

"Among the mysteries of the fates of several North Pole explorers, that of Andrée and his balloon expedition may be the greatest," said P.J. Capelotti, professor of anthropology at Penn State University and author of *The Greatest Show in the Arctic*. "He used a novel, daring, and, as many thought, foolhardy

**Salomon August Andrée**, 1897 portrait AURIMAGES



## MILESTONES



technology all but guaranteed to appeal to the imagination."

Over a week after the launch, one of Andrée's carrier pigeons was intercepted with a message. Written on July 13, it stated: "82 deg. north latitude ... Good journey eastwards, 10 deg. south. All goes well on board. This is third pigeon post." No other messages, however, were found.

"Where is Andrée? is the question being asked the civilized world over," declared the *Galveston Daily News* on August 6. Years would pass before two buoys were found, both dropped on the day of the launch. One read: "We are now in over the ice which is much broken up in all directions. Weather magnificent. In best of humors." Expeditions were sent to find the three men, but no trace

of them or the balloon was found. The mission was lost.

### Unexpected Recovery

More than three decades later, the mystery would be solved. In August 1930 a team of Norwegian scientists were studying glaciers aboard a seal-hunting vessel. They took advantage of the unusually warm summer to land on White Island.

Exploring the island, they were surprised to find the remains of a boat sticking out of the ice. In it was a hook with the words "Andrée's Pol. Exp. 1896" stamped on it. More than three decades had passed, but the fate of the Andrée expedition was finally known.

After further exploration, the remains of Andrée, Strindberg, and Fraenkel were recovered, as were their diaries, logbooks, camera, and

## A STORY BURIED IN ICE

**ANDRÉE'S DIARIES** were found within an insulating layer of hay that had been carefully wrapped in a sweater and scraps of the silk balloon. A few months after their recovery in 1930, *Andrée's Story: The Complete Records of His Polar Flight* was published amid great international interest.

Diaries of Salomon August Andrée, found in 1930 AURIMAGES



**NILS STRINDBERG** joined Andrée's expedition to document the Arctic landscape in photographs. His film was found in 1930, together with the team's diaries. Out of 240 negatives, 93 were recovered and 20 were successfully developed. Taken around July 19, 1897, this is a photograph of the camp setup near the balloon's crash site, just before the crew began heading south on foot. Fraenkel stands in the center, and Andrée can be seen farther back, scanning the sky.

GRANGER/AURIMAGES



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film. The three men's bodies were transported back to the Swedish capital, Stockholm, where they were cremated and buried.

The diaries and photographs clarified much of what had befallen the crew after takeoff in July 1897. The Örnen had remained airborne for nearly three days as it drifted northeast. Andrée's sense of wonder is apparent from his journal entries:

*Is it not a little strange to be floating here above the Polar Sea? To be the first that have floated here in a balloon... We think we can well face death, having done what we have done. Isn't it all, perhaps, the expression of an extremely strong sense of individuality which cannot bear the thought of living and dying like a man in the ranks, forgotten by coming generations?*

While this entry was being written, the mission was already running into trouble. Shifting winds pushed the craft westward from July 12. Hydrogen gas was leaking from the balloon, which was hovering at low altitude. Fog caused a layer of thick ice to form on the balloon's surface, weighing it down. To stay aloft, they threw out ballast and some equipment, but to no avail. For long stretches, the balloon bounced along the ground "about every 50 meters." On July 14 the team decided to jump ship and abandon the mission, 300 miles away from the pole.

Photographs developed from Strindberg's frozen film reveal the remains of the crashed balloon and the camp the men set up near the crash site. Just over a week after the crash, the team decided to try to reach Franz Josef Land, an archipelago in Russia, where they had stashed emergency supplies. After they moved equipment across drifting ice for days,

the ice started to drift west. "This is not encouraging," Andrée wrote.

The three continued trying to move toward safety, but by mid-September, with dropping temperatures, they had no choice but to hunker down. They built a shelter from ice blocks and hunted seals and polar bears. In early October shifting ice forced them to White Island. On October 8, as bad weather closed in, Andrée made his last entry.

The causes of the men's deaths are still unknown. Experts believe the trio had enough supplies to have survived the winter but were struck by illness. Researchers at Sweden's Karolinska Institute, together with Andrée historian Bea Uusma, are applying the latest technology to decipher Andrée's last diary, much of which is illegible. "We are finding clues that look promising, but there is still work to be done," Uusma said.

—Braden Phillips

## PAPYRI IN THE DESERT

Arid conditions at the Wadi al-Jarf site in Egypt helped preserve the ancient Merer papyri, which were discovered there by a French-led team of archaeologists.

WITH THANKS TO PIERRE TALLET, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION TO WADI AL-JARF

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# THE RED SEA SCROLLS

## SECRETS OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PAPYRI

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In 2013, archaeologists made a sensational discovery on the shores of the Red Sea: the diary of Merer, head of a team of workers employed by Khufu to build his Great Pyramid.

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JOSÉ MIGUEL PARRA



A satellite photo centers on the Red Sea, which Egyptian traders had to cross to obtain copper from Sinai.

GRANGER/ALBUM

located on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea, Wadi al-Jarf is a quiet, unassuming place today. Dry desert sands and placid blue water stretch out as far as the eye can see; across the water one can spy the Sinai Peninsula. This seeming tranquility masks the busy hub it once was more than 4,000 years ago. Wadi al-Jarf's historical importance was cemented in 2013 when 30 papyri, the world's oldest, were found hidden away in man-made limestone caves there.

Aside from their age, the so-called Red Sea Scrolls are remarkable for their contents. Not only do they reveal Wadi al-Jarf's distant past as a bustling port, they also contain eyewitness accounts of a man named Merer who took part in the building of the Great Pyramid of Pharaoh Khufu.

This ivory statuette is one of the only depictions of Pharaoh Khufu that survives from his time, some 4,500 years ago. Egyptian Museum, Cairo

The Wadi al-Jarf site was first discovered in 1823 by an English traveler and antiquarian, John Gardner Wilkinson, who believed its ruins to be a Greco-Roman necropolis. Then, in the 1950s, two archaeology-loving French pilots, François Bissey and René Chabot-Morisseau, stumbled upon the site again. They suggested that it had once been a center for metal production. But the 1956 Suez crisis delayed further investigation.

It wasn't until 2008 that work at the site resumed. French Egyptologist Pierre Tallet led a series of excavations that definitively identified Wadi al-Jarf as an important port that dated back some 4,500 years to the reign of Khufu and the building of the Great Pyramid. Tallet's teams revealed that Wadi al-Jarf was a vibrant economic hub at the center of the trade in materials used to build the pyramids, some 150 miles away. Supporting the archaeology was the landmark find of Merer's diary among the papyri.

## Pyramid Port

The Wadi al-Jarf site consists of several different areas, spread over several miles between the Nile



The Pyramids of Giza are among the greatest engineering marvels in history. Khafre's tomb (center) still retains some of its original limestone cladding. The limestone that once enveloped Khufu's Great Pyramid (right) was transported from the quarry by many teams like the one overseen by Merer.

RENÉ MATTES/GTRES





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## HARBOR'S HISTORY

### **ca 2613 B.C.**

Founder of the Old Kingdom's 4th dynasty, Sneferu comes to power. Several pyramids are built during his reign.

### **ca 2580 B.C.**

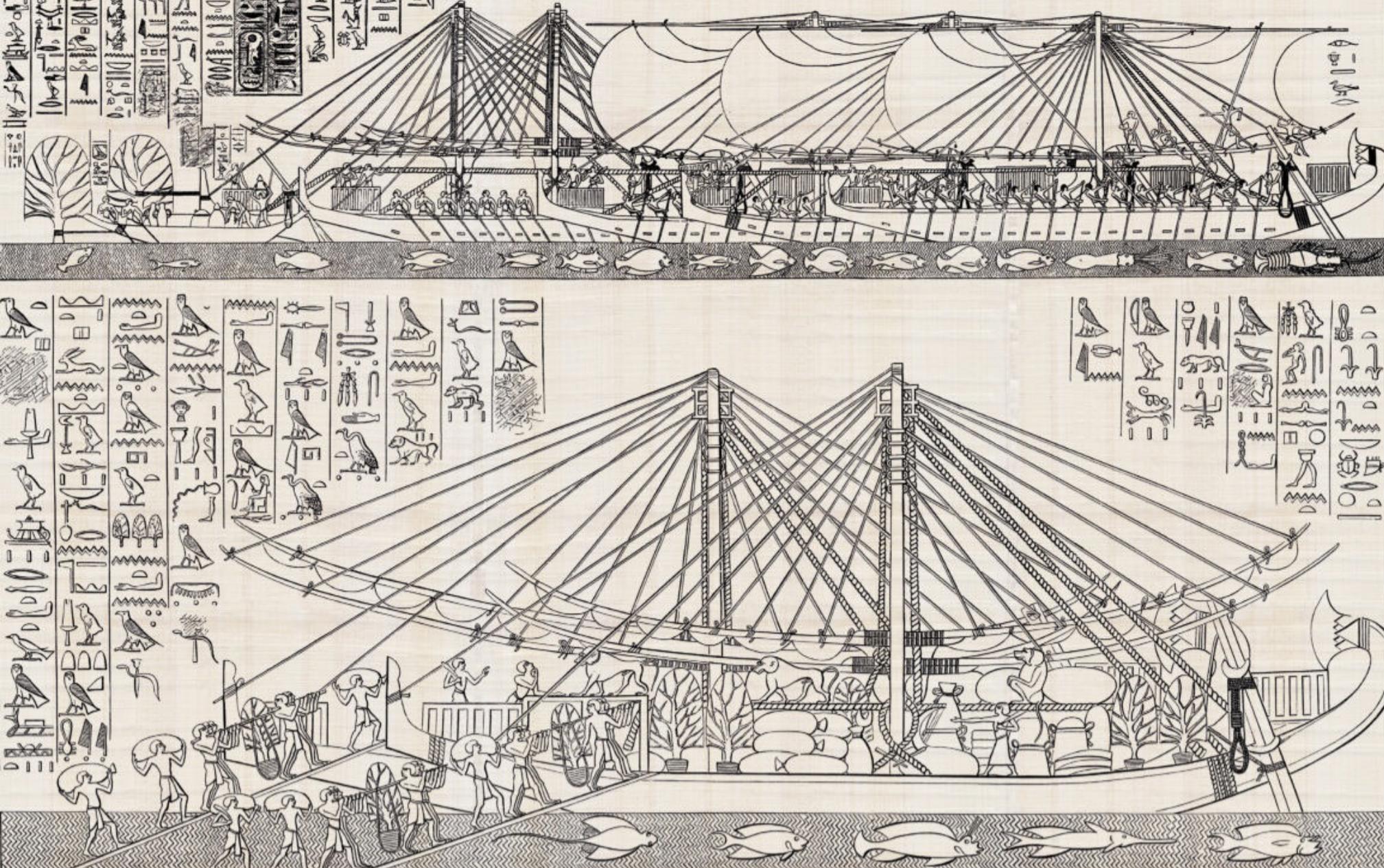
Shortly before Sneferu's heir, Khufu, becomes pharaoh, a port is built at Wadi al-Jarf, on the shores of the Red Sea.

### **ca 2509-2483 B.C.**

Wadi al-Jarf becomes a trade hub for the copper and other materials needed to build Khufu's massive pyramid at Giza.

### **ca 2480 B.C.**

Around the time of Khufu's death, the harbor complex at Wadi al-Jarf is decommissioned.



## EGYPTIAN SHIPS

A sketch (above) of a 15th-century B.C. relief from the temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dayr al-Bahri shows workers loading ships sailing to the Land of Punt.

ALAMY/ACI

and the Red Sea. From the direction of the Nile, the first area, about three miles from the coast, contains some 30 large limestone chambers used for storage. It was in these caves that the papyri were discovered.

Continuing east toward the sea for another 500 yards, a series of camps appears, and after those, a large stone building divided into 13 parallel sections. Archaeologists surmised that the building was used as a residence. Finally, on the coast is the harbor itself with

dwellings and more storage spaces. Using pottery and inscriptions found at the site, archaeologists have been able to date the harbor complex to Egypt's 4th dynasty, some 4,500 years ago. They believe the harbor was inaugurated in the time of Pharaoh Sneferu and abandoned around the end of his son Khufu's reign. It was active for a short period, but during that time the port was devoted to building Khufu's tomb, known then as Akhet-Khufu, meaning "Horizon of Khufu."

Along with the papyri, many other important archaeological finds there have revealed the importance of the port. Large structures, like the 600-foot-long stone jetty, show deep material investment in the area. Tallet and his team uncovered some 130 anchors, whose presence implies a busy harbor.

From the harbor, called "The Bush" by the ancient Egyptians, the pharaoh's ships would sail across the Red Sea to the copper-rich Sinai



**Large stones block** the entrance to storage caves at the ancient harbor complex of Wadi al-Jarf, on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea.

WITH THANKS TO PIERRE TALLET,  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION TO WADI AL-JARF



## Mediterranean Sea

# Shifting Ports

**THE SINAI PENINSULA** was rich in the materials Egyptians needed to build their massive monuments in the Old Kingdom. During the reign of Snefru some 4,500 years ago, the harbor at Wadi al-Jarf was built to secure a regular supply of copper from Sinai. This port was the main trading hub for only a short time. Several decades after its founding, it was decommissioned in favor of Ayn Soukhna, which was farther north and closer to Memphis. Ayn Soukhna was in use for the remainder of the Old Kingdom. In the Middle Kingdom, the port of Mersa Gawasis grew in importance. It was much farther south, closer to Dendera and Thebes.

WITH THANKS TO PIERRE TALLET, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION TO WADI AL-JARF



# ANCIENT MULTITASKING

**MERER'S DIARY** recorded his team's seemingly mundane tasks, and these have given historians important insights into the work that went into building the Great Pyramid. Rather than one document, his writings are found in several of the papyri unearthed at Wadi al-Jarf. Papyri A and B deal with the transport of limestone blocks to Giza. Papyrus C mentions the construction of nautical facilities, and Papyrus D details surveillance work performed around the Khufu funerary complex. Papyrus E records the six-month period that Merer's team spent crossing the Red Sea transporting workers, food, and copper from one coast to another. Papyrus H details perhaps the most important detail of all: payment of rations. Merer's team was a valuable part of multiple projects, revealing how complex building the pyramid was.



## HARD LABOR

Construction workers carry sandstone blocks in a relief detail (left) from the Temple of Luxor, Egypt. Mid-second millennium B.C.

PRISMA/ALBUM

## HARBOR IN GIZA

The harbor at Giza (right) was where workers unloaded the stone blocks to build the Great Pyramid. Watercolor by J.C. Golvin

MUSÉE DÉPARTEMENTAL ARLES ANTIQUE  
© J.C. GOLVIN/ÉDITIONS ERRANCE

Peninsula. Copper was the hardest metal then available, and the Egyptians needed it to cut the stones for their pharaoh's massive pyramid. When Egyptian ships returned to port, they were loaded with copper. Between voyages, the ships were stored in the limestone chambers.

## Treasures in the Caves

After the Wadi al-Jarf harbor was decommissioned around Khufu's death, records show that a team was sent from Giza to close the storage spaces carved into the limestone. They were known as the Escort Team of "the Uraeus of Khufu Is Its Prow," which most likely refers to a ship bearing the Uraeus (protective cobra) on its prow. During the process of blocking up the limestone caves, Merer's now obsolete papyrus documents likely became lodged among the stone blocks.

They remained in the desert air for some four and a half millennia until their discovery during an excavation by Tallet in 2013. The first batch of Red Sea Scrolls was found on March 24 that year near the entrance to the storage space designated G2. The second and largest set of documents was found 10 days later, wedged between blocks in storage space G1.

There are several types of documents among the Red Sea Scrolls, but the writings of Merer caused the most excitement. The leader of a working party, Merer kept records of its activities in his diary. It is a daily record of the work his team carried out over a three-month period during the construction of the Great Pyramid.

Merer's team consisted of some 200 workers who traveled across Egypt and were responsible for carrying out all tasks related to the construction of the Great Pyramid. Among the most interesting were the limestone blocks used for the pyramid's cladding. Merer recorded in great detail how the team retrieved them from the quarries of Tura and brought them by boat to Giza.

Merer's men would load the limestone blocks onto boats, transport them up the Nile, and watch when they were tallied in an administrative area before being taken to Giza. A fragment from the diary records the three-day journey from the quarry to the pyramid's site:

*Day 25: Inspector Merer spends the day with his za [team] hauling stones in south Tura; spends the night in south Tura. Day 26: Inspector Merer sets sail with his za from south*





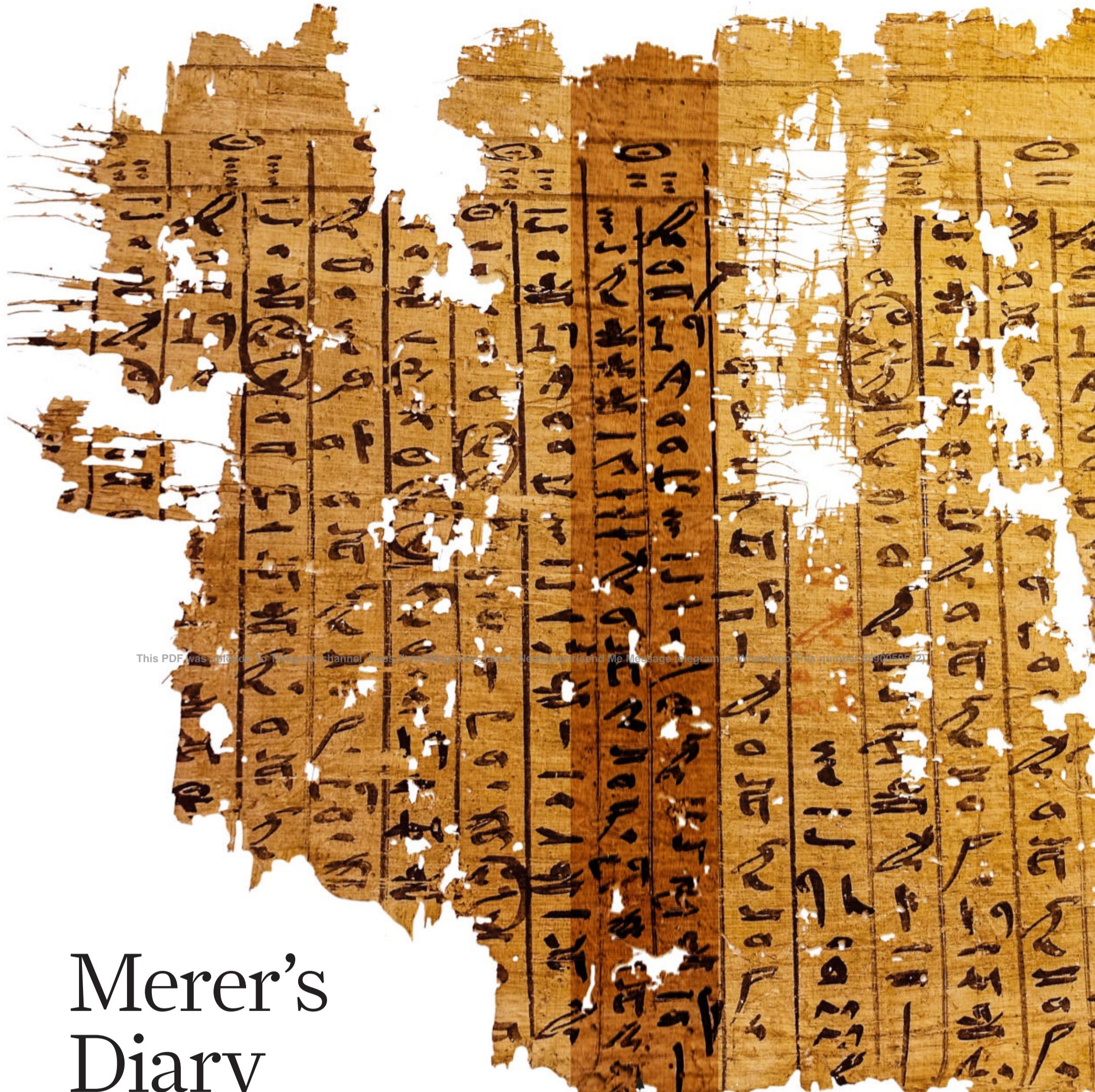
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# Merer's Diary

Archaeologists found hundreds of papyrus fragments in the caves at Wadi al-Jarf. Written in black and red ink, the texts mention Pharaoh Khufu. Many of these fragments have been pieced back together to form documents—some measuring two feet long! The fragment of Merer's journal shown here is from Papyrus B.

WITH THANKS TO PIERRE TALLET, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION TO WADI AL-JARF





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### Day 5:

...Inspector Merer spends the day with his za loading stones onto the hau belonging to the Elite of north Tura, he spends the night in Tura...

**za:** team of workers  
**hau:** special ship for loading blocks

**Elite:** perhaps a group of high officials

**Mentioned** in Merer's diary, Ankhaf was a royal architect and half brother of Khufu. This 4,500-year-old bust of Ankhaf was found in his tomb. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
SCALA, FLORENCE



*Tura, laden with stone blocks, to Akhet-Khufu [the Great Pyramid]; spends the night in She-Khufu [administrative area with storage space for the ashlar, just before Giza]. Day 27: Embark at She-Khufu, sail to Akhet-Khufu laden with stones, spend the night at Akhet-Khufu.*

The next day, Merer and his workers returned to the quarry to pick up a new shipment of stones:

*Day 28: Set sail from Akhet-Khufu in the morning; navigate up the river towards south Tura. Day 29: Inspector Merer spends the day with his za hauling stones in south Tura; spends the night in south Tura. Day 30: Inspector Merer spends the day with his za hauling stones in south Tura; spends the night in south Tura.*



**Rations were** a form of payment in Merer's time. Lidded basket with figs, ca 14th century B.C. British Museum, London  
BRITISH MUSEUM/SCALA, FLORENCE

Merer's diary even gives a glimpse of one of the pyramid's architects. Ankhaf, Khufu's half brother, held the position of "head of all the king's works." One of the papyrus fragments states: "Day 24: Inspector Merer spends the day with his za hauling [text missing] with people in elite positions, aper-teams, and the noble Ankhaf, director of Ro-She Khufu."

## Working Men

Merer also carefully kept track of how his crew was paid. Since there was no currency in pharaonic Egypt, salary payments were made generally in measures of grain. There was a basic unit, the "ration," and the worker received more or less according to their category on the administrative ladder. According to the papyri, the workers' basic diet was *hedj* (leavened bread), *pesem* (flat bread), various meats, dates, honey, and legumes, all washed down with beer.

It has been long accepted that a large labor force built the Great Pyramid, but historians have long debated the status of this workforce. Many have argued that the workers must have been enslaved, but the Red Sea Scrolls contradict this notion. Merer's detailed payment records demonstrate that those who built the pyramids were skilled workers who received compensation for their services.

There is something even more extraordinary in the lines of the frail papyri. In the words of Merer, there is a firsthand account of a person who not only witnessed the building of the pyramids but whose team was also a crucial part of the everyday business of getting the job done. Because of this discovery, Egyptologists have a detailed (and somewhat prosaic) snapshot of the final stages of the Great Pyramid's construction. ■

AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS ON PYRAMIDS AND DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT,  
JOSÉ MIGUEL PARRA HAS PARTICIPATED IN RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT LUXOR.

### Learn more

*The Red Sea Scrolls: How Ancient Papyri Reveal the Secrets of the Pyramids.*  
Pierre Tallet and Mark Lehner. Thames & Hudson, 2022.



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### THE GREAT PYRAMID

The limestone cladding on Khufu's pyramid has disappeared over time. Today only the rougher stones used for the inner structure of the pyramid remain.

BRECK P. KENT/AGE FOTOSTOCK

# FLOATING TO GIZA

Materials used to build the Great Pyramid came from all over Egypt: limestone from the Tura quarries near Cairo, basalt from Fayyum, granite from Aswan, and copper from the Sinai Peninsula. In order to transport these materials swiftly and smoothly, artificial waterways were built at Giza so that goods could travel by boat as much as possible.

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**3D model** made by Rebekah Miracle based on a topographical reconstruction by Mark Lehner.

## ① THE FLOOD

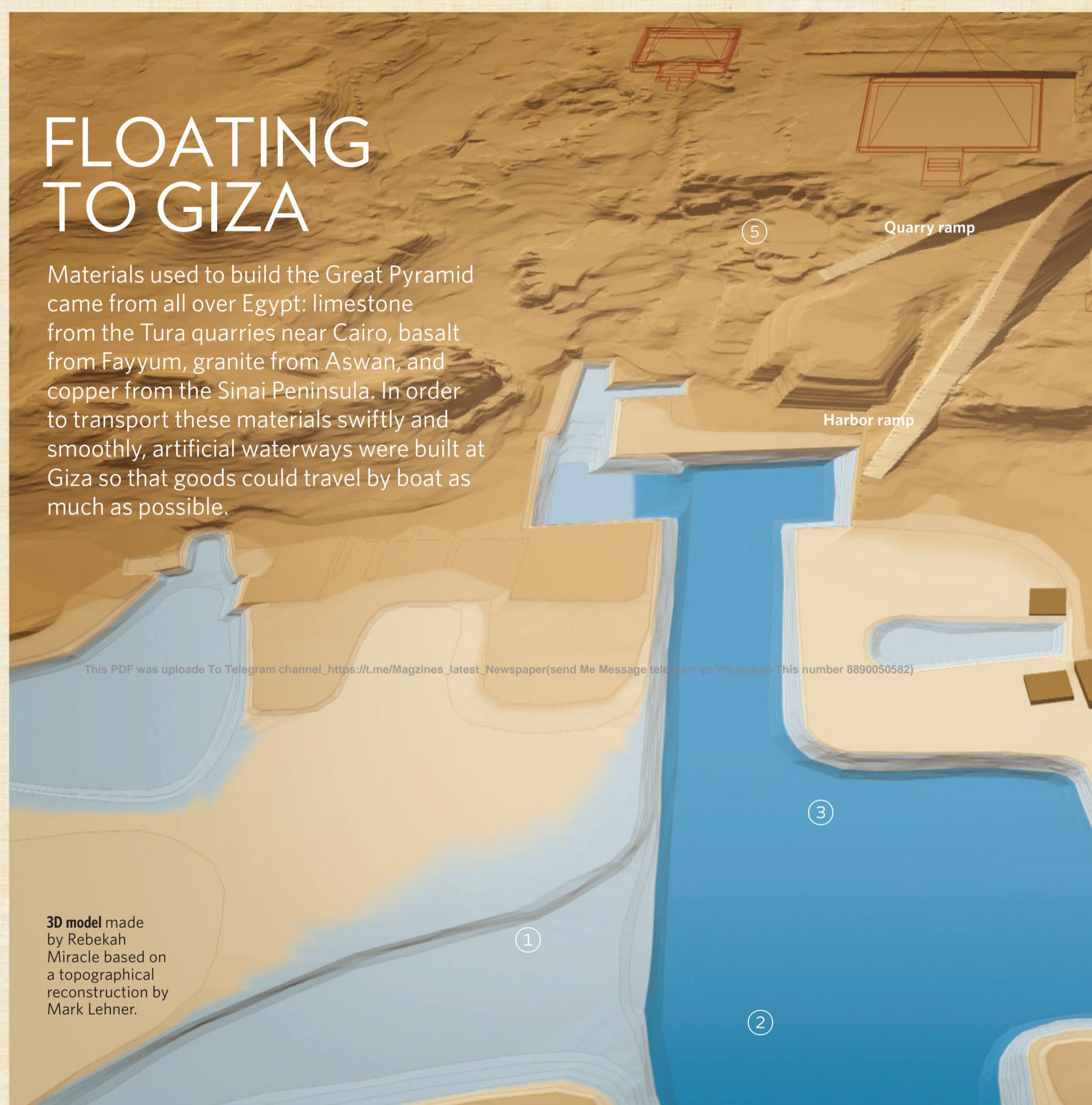
During the annual flooding of the Nile that occurred in the late summer months, the lakes would swell and spill over to reach this high-water mark.

## ② RO-SHE KHUFU

"The Mouth of the Lake of Khufu" was an access to two inner lakes close to the pyramid construction site. Merer's diary mentions spending time here.

## ③ SHE KHUFU

"Lake of Khufu" was opposite the main construction site for the pyramid. Building material was unloaded and transported to the pyramid via a ramp.





#### ④ AKHET-KHUFU

The ancient Egyptians called the Great Pyramid Akhet-Khufu, meaning “horizon of Khufu.” Merer wrote often of his comings and goings to and from the site.

#### ⑤ QUARRY

Stone blocks used for the inner structure were quarried close to Khufu’s pyramid. When the quarry was exhausted, it was repurposed as a cemetery.

#### ⑥ SHE AKHET-KHUFU

“The Lake of the Horizon of Khufu” was a smaller body of water and probably served smaller vessels. Merer also mentions this location in his diary.

#### RIDING TO ROME

The 19th-century painter Évariste Vital Luminais often depicted ancient Gallic people in his works, such as "Gauls in Sight of Rome" seen here, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy, France.

**Opposite:** Celtic helmet, fourth to third century b.c., National Archaeological Museum, Saint-Germain-en-Laye

PICTURE: ARTEPICS/ALAMY  
HELMET: THIERRY LE MAGE/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

# THE GAULS SACK ROME

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In the early fourth century B.C., Gallic warriors conquered Rome and plundered its wealth. The words of their leader, Brennus, would haunt Romans for generations: "Vae victis—Woe to the vanquished."

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JAVIER NEGRETE

T

he Roman Republic was booming in the beginning of the fourth century B.C. Wealthy and powerful, it had just defeated the Etruscan city of Veii, amassed an immense war chest, and doubled its territory.

But then, out of the blue, the republic suffered the unthinkable: occupation by a Celtic people, the Gauls. This was the first time that Rome and Gaul would face off, but it would not be the last.

Over the coming centuries, the Romans and the Gauls would clash many times. But this first defeat in 387 B.C. caused a collective trauma for Rome that lasted generations, shaping Roman attitudes toward all peoples from the north.

### Early Encounters

By 600 B.C. the Gallic people Insubres had already settled south of the Alps, where they founded Mediolanum (today's Milan). Over the next two centuries, other Gallic peoples would do the same and expand into southern and western Europe. Around 400 B.C. the Senones settled on the shores of the Adriatic, in the region that the Romans would later call Ager Gallicus. But this settlement was still a safe distance from Rome and on the other side of the Apennines that form the mountainous backbone of the Italian peninsula.

A decade later, the Senones crossed the mountains and attacked the Etruscan city of Clusium, about 90 miles north of Rome. Writing more than four centuries later, the Roman historian Livy described this Gallic expansion and how the people of Clusium appealed

to Rome for help (they were denied). Roman historians described the Gauls in big sweeping strokes, which were likely exaggerated. The Gauls were tall, pale, long-haired, blond, and mustached. Some of them, according to first-century B.C. Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, lightened their hair with "lime-water."

There are various theories as to why they made this incursion into the Italian peninsula. In general, Roman sources suggest that the Gauls were less developed as a society than the inhabitants of Italy and coveted their farmland, in particular their wine. In the first century A.D., centuries after early Gallic expansion, the Greek scholar Plutarch wrote that when the Gauls tasted wine for the first time they became "beside themselves with the novel pleasure which it gave" and they set off "in quest of the land which produced such fruit, considering the rest of the world barren and wild." Although the Gauls' fondness for wine did tend to be exaggerated, there was a kernel of truth to it. Later, Italian and Roman wine merchants would enter Gaul as the peaceful forerunners to the legions that would follow.



Dating to the fourth century B.C., this bronze disk was found in a Gallic chariot burial in Cuperly, France. Musee d'Archeologie Nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye  
S. COMPOINT/ONLYFRANCE

## GAULS VERSUS ROMANS

**Circa 600 B.C.**  
Gallic peoples move south of the Alps into northern Italy, where they will found Mediolanum (Milan).

## VENI VIDI VINO

According to some Roman historians, the Gauls moved south into Italy because they adored Italian wines, like the ones produced in the vineyards of Ancona.

MASSIMO RIPANI/FOTOTECA 9X12



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### 400 B.C.

The Gallic Senones settle on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, in the territory the Romans will call Ager Gallicus.

### Circa 390 B.C.

Clusium, an Etruscan city north of Rome, begs the republic for help after the Senones invade and seize their lands.

### 387 B.C.

Gallic commander Brennus defeats Roman forces at the Battle of the Allia. His forces will continue on to sack Rome.

### 284 B.C.

After a series of conflicts with Gallic peoples, Rome conquers Ager Gallicus.

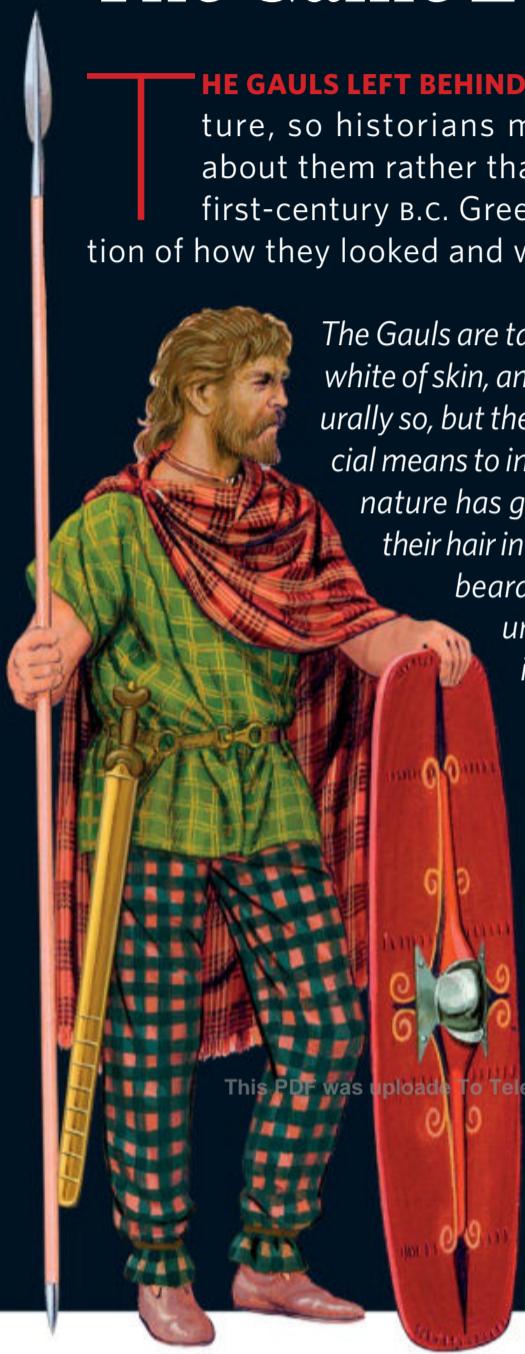
# The Gallic Look

**T**HE GAULS LEFT BEHIND no written records of their culture, so historians must rely on what was written about them rather than what was written by them. A first-century B.C. Greek scholar wrote a vivid description of how they looked and what kinds of clothes they wore:

*The Gauls are tall of body, with rippling muscles, and white of skin, and their hair is blond, and not only naturally so, but they also make it their practice by artificial means to increase the distinguishing color which nature has given it. For they are always washing their hair in lime-water... Some of them shave the beard... but they let the moustache grow until it covers the mouth... The clothing they wear is striking: shirts which have been dyed and embroidered in varied colors, and breeches, which they call in their tongue bracae; and they wear striped coats, fastened by a buckle on the shoulder, heavy for winter wear and light for summer, in which are set checks, close together and of varied hues.*

A chief of the Gallic Senones around the fourth to third century B.C. might have worn checked trousers and been armed with a shield, sword, and spear.

PETER CONNOLLY/AKG/ALBUM



## CALL TO ARMS

A boar's head forms the upper part of a *carnyx* (below), a wind instrument used by Iron Age Celts, possibly to call soldiers into combat. Second or first century B.C.; found at Corrèze in central France

RMN-GRAND PALAIS



## Seasoned Warriors

The Gauls were visually striking because of their clothing, which was dyed with bright colors. Unlike the Romans, the men wore pants (*bracae* in Latin), a garment typical of the nomadic horsemen of the Eurasian steppes. The Greeks and Romans considered it barbaric—even effeminate—for men to wear such attire. The elite among the Gauls wore jewelry, most notably torques, which are thick metal necklaces of gold or silver, open at the front and twisted like braids. In 361 B.C., some years after the assault on Rome, a young Roman called Titus Manlius came face-to-face with a gigantic Gallic warrior in single combat. Despite the Gaul's immense size—in Roman tales the height of the Celts is always emphasized—Titus defeated him, seized his torque, and was

known thereafter as Torquatus, a moniker that would pass to his descendants.

As for protection in conflict, many Gallic warriors had nothing more than an elongated oval shield and a helmet adorned with feathers. Their typical weapon was a long sword, best suited for slashing. Many stereotypes grew up about the ferocity with which the Gauls fought; allegedly it was more daunting than that of other adversaries the Romans had faced until then. Writing in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., Greek historian Strabo explained:

*The whole race which is now called both “Gallic” and “Galatic” is war-mad, and both high-spirited and quick for battle, although otherwise simple and not ill-mannered. And therefore, if roused, they come together all at once for the struggle... As for their might, it arises partly from their large physique and partly from their numbers.*

According to classical sources, the Gauls attacked en masse to the sound of their war horns, without the use of tactical formations or reserve troops. Strabo felt it would make it easier over time for the Romans to conquer Gaul than Hispania, home of the Iberians. Whereas the Gauls tended to “fall upon their opponents all at once and in great numbers,” meaning they would be “defeated all at once,” the Iberians “would husband their resources and divide their struggles, carrying on war in the manner of brigands, different men at different times and in separate divisions.”

## Battle of the Allia

The Etruscans of Clusium called on Rome to help them. The Senate sent three ambassadors who entreated Brennus, leader of the Gallic Senones, to withdraw. When Brennus refused, the ambassadors, instead of returning to Rome, joined the ranks of Clusium in trying to repel the Gauls. By throwing their support so obviously behind the Clusines, they contravened the law of nations, the equivalent of current international law. This decision gave Brennus a pretext to declare war on Rome. After defeating the Clusines, Brennus led his troops south toward Rome. Livy described their terrifying procession: “The whole country in front and around

### ROMANS AND GAULS

A 19th-century painting by Évariste Vital Luminais depicts an idealized combat scene between Roman and Gallic horsemen. Museum of Fine Arts, Carcassonne, France

P. CARTIER/BRIDGEMAN/ACI



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**The Gauls** scale the slope of the capitol. Engraving by Henri-Paul Motte, 1900  
ALBUM



was now swarming with the enemy, who, being as a nation given to wild outbreaks, had by their hideous howls and discordant clamor filled everything with dreadful noise."

A Roman army marched north and intercepted the Gauls less than 10 miles outside the city on the banks of the Allia River, a tributary of the Tiber. It was the first time that the legions had fought against the Gauls, and the result was disastrous. The Romans were outnumbered, a situation that happened often in their clashes with the Gauls.

As a result, the tribunes of consular rank who commanded the Roman army redeployed soldiers to the flanks. The center, with ranks depleted, was soon breached, and the Gauls surged unstoppably forward. The legionaries from the left flank fled to the neighboring city of Veii, 10 miles northwest of Rome, while those on the right retreated to the capital itself.

Three days later, Brennus and his army of Gauls stood at the gates of Rome. The city was exposed, for it lacked a complete perimeter wall. The bulk of the population fled—even the Vestal Virgins, guardians of the city's sacred fire. With no one to oppose them, the Gauls stormed into Rome and pillaged the city. High-ranking elderly senators, who had refused to be evacuated, sat in their curule chairs in the middle of the Forum or, according to some sources, in the atria of their houses.

Roman sources claim that when the first Gauls arrived, they were stunned by the dignity and composure of these elder statesmen. One invader allegedly tugged at the long white beard of Senator Marcus Papirius to see if the figure might be a statue. Papirius responded with a blow from his cane. The Gaul then killed Papirius with his sword, and his companions massacred the rest. Brennus's men looted and destroyed the city as the terrified populace looked on. Livy wrote:

*In whatever direction, their attention was drawn by the shouts of the enemy, the shrieks of the women and boys, the roar of the flames, and the crash of houses falling in, thither they turned their eyes and minds as though set by Fortune to be spectators of their country's fall, powerless to protect anything left of all they possessed beyond their lives.*

Some Romans had managed to take refuge on the Capitoline Hill and were safely hidden. But the Gauls spotted footprints going up the hill that belonged to a messenger, who the Romans had sent to Ardea to seek help. The Gauls followed the same route and sent an advance party up the hillside that very night. Neither the Roman guards nor their watchdogs heard them coming, but geese sacred to the goddess Juno that lived there did. The alarmed honking alerted the Roman defenders, who took up arms and forced their attackers back.

## Woe to the Vanquished

Seven months passed and the Gauls held their siege. But it took its toll on them. According to Livy, "They had their camp on low-lying ground between the hills, which had been scorched by the fires and was full of malaria... Accustomed

### THE SENATOR STRIKES BACK

During the invasion of Rome in 387 B.C., the Gauls broke into the house of Senator Marcus Papirius and found him sitting in his curule seat, totally motionless. When one of them tugged his beard to see if he was a statue, Papirius struck him with a staff. Oil painting by Théobald Chartran, 1877, Beaux-Arts de Paris

THIERRY OLLIVIER/RMN-GRAND PALAIS



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# Keeping Their Heads

**R**OMAN HISTORIANS SEEMED TO RELISH tales that highlighted the savagery of the Celtic Gauls, including how they decapitated their enemies and kept their heads as trophies. One particularly gruesome account was written by Livy in the first century B.C. He described the fate of Roman consul Lucius Postumius, who died in 216 B.C. fighting against the Boii people, who lived across an area from today's northern Italy. As Livy recounts, the Boii took the consul's head "into the most sacred temple ... Afterwards they cleansed the head ... and having covered the skull with chased gold, used it as a cup for libations in their solemn festivals." Another account from Greek historian Diodorus Siculus details how the Gauls would also preserve the heads in cedar oil. These accounts may feel exaggerated, but in 2018 scholars found evidence to back them up. A research team tested 11 skulls that showed signs of decapitation and found evidence of conifer resin, supporting the tales of ritual embalming of heads.



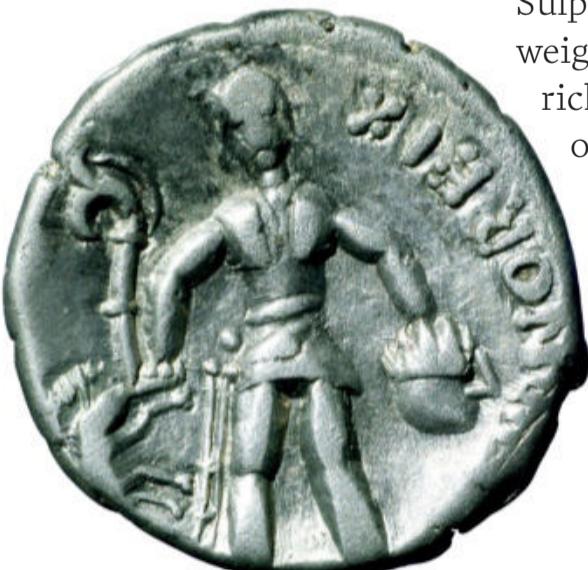
Celtic sculpted heads from the oppidum of Entremont, second-century B.C. sculpture, Granet Museum, Aix-en-Provence

DEA/ALBUM

## SIGNS OF STRENGTH

Minted by the Gallic tribe of the Aedu, a first-century B.C. coin (below) shows a warrior with a war horn, or carnyx, in one hand and a severed head in the other. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

ALBUM



as a nation to wet and cold, they could not stand this at all, and tortured as they were by heat and suffocation, disease became rife among them, and they died off like sheep."

At last, a negotiated settlement was reached. The Gauls agreed to leave Rome in exchange for a thousand pounds of gold. The defenders came down from Capitoline Hill bearing treasures and weighed them in the Forum before their conquerors. When the tribune Quintus Sulpicius noticed the Gauls were putting fake weights onto the scales in order to claim more riches, he complained. Brennus dropped his own sword onto the scales and exclaimed,

"Vae victis—Woe to the vanquished." Resigned, the Romans handed over even more gold to offset the weight of the sword.

Roman historians differ on how the Gallic siege ended. Both Plutarch and

Livy say that Marcus Furius Camillus, an exiled general, responds to Rome's call for help. He is appointed dictator and uses his might to expel the Gallic forces. Writing in the second century B.C., the historian Polybius makes no mention of Camillus or an expulsion of the Gauls. Rather, in his telling, Rome pays a ransom and the Gauls simply leave.

## Facts and Fictions

Classical sources undoubtedly contain factual details, but legendary elements and exaggerations are woven among them. There is some evidence to show that Rome did suffer a defeat and sacking around 387 B.C.: Greek authors such as Aristotle and Heraclides of Pontus, who were writing not long after the events, mention an invasion. Archaeologists, however, have not found evidence of mass destruction and fires as terrible as in Livy's writings. Rome appears to have recovered very quickly in the years that followed, which would have been unlikely if the damage were as severe as described. Evidence suggests that rather than a Gallic army set on occupation, the invaders were a band of warriors who attacked Rome in a quick raid. They probably looted what they could but did not demolish buildings or set fire to the city.

The story of the Gallic invasion as retold in the histories written centuries later is evidence of *metus gallicus*, an exaggerated fear of Gauls and other northern peoples. This prejudice was galvanized at the end of the second century B.C. as groups of Germanic Cimbri and Teutoni people pushed south into Roman territory. Metus gallicus would become a driving force in Rome's expansionary policy. The perceived threat would serve as the pretext for Julius Caesar's first-century B.C. campaigns in Gaul, and it also explains why his victories over the Gauls were celebrated with an unprecedented 15 or even 20 days of thanksgiving back home in Rome. ■

AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN JAVIER NEGRETE HAS WRITTEN EXTENSIVELY ON CLASSICAL GREEK HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY.

*Learn more*

***The Early History of Rome***  
by Titus Livy, edited by Aubrey de Selincourt, Penguin Classics, 2002

### TIPPING THE SCALES

The Gauls use a scale to weigh the treasures that the Romans have given them as payment for their retreat. Brennus adds weight by placing his sword on the balance so that it weighs more. Oil painting by Sebastiano Ricci, 18th century, Museum of Fine Arts, Ajaccio

GÉRARD BLOT/RMN-GRAND PALAIS



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# SOUNDS (AND HONKS) OF ALARM

**SACRED GEESE LIVED** in the goddess Juno's temple on Capitoline Hill during the Roman Republic. This gaggle became a band of unlikely heroes when the Gauls sacked the city in 387 B.C. It was the geese that prevented the last stronghold in Rome from falling into the hands of the Gauls. The story appears in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, written around the second century A.D.: "There were some sacred geese near the temple of Juno, which were usually fed without stint, but at that time, since provisions barely sufficed for the garrison



"Sacred Geese of the Capitol," Henri-Paul Motte, oil painting, 1889, private collection

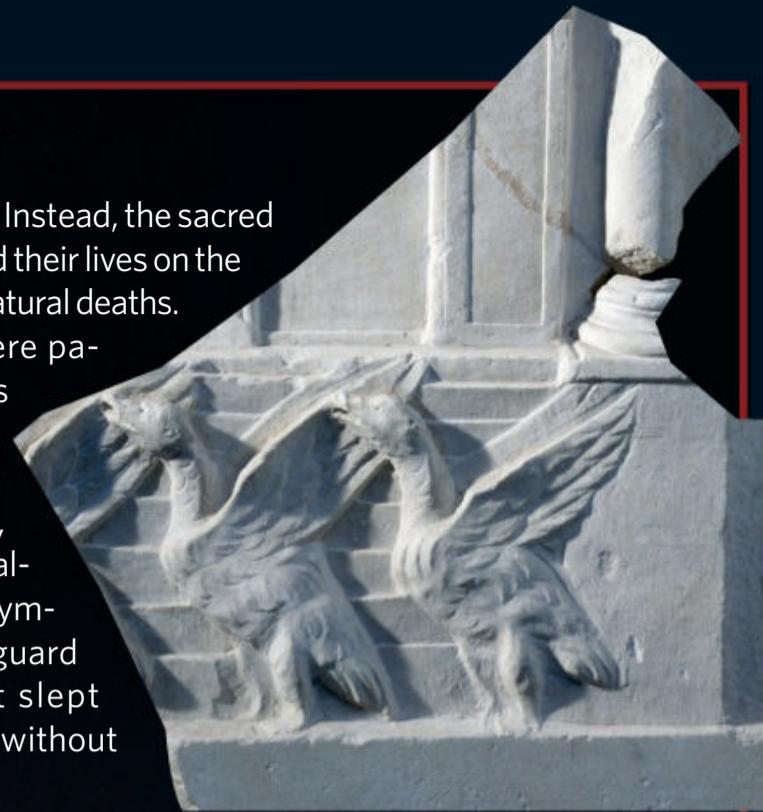
ALAMY/ACI

alone, they were neglected and in evil plight. The creature is naturally sharp of hearing and afraid of every noise, and these, being specially wakeful and restless by reason of their hunger, perceived the approach of the Gauls, dashed at them with loud cries, and so waked all the garrison."

**THE GEESE WERE** kept in the temple because they were used in divination practices. Their honks and calls would be assessed for their strength, frequency, and tone. Based on these measurements, the priestesses would determine if the gods were favorable to their plans. In the temple of Juno, geese had been sacrificed to the goddess, but after their heroics during the Gallic in-

vasion, the practice ceased. Instead, the sacred geese were allowed to spend their lives on the temple grounds until their natural deaths.

**ONCE A YEAR** the geese were paraded through the streets of Rome on litters, to be honored by all the people. During the same ceremony, live dogs were hung from gallows, or even crucified, as symbolic punishment for the guard dogs on the capitol that slept through the Gallic assault without raising the alarm.



#### ▲ WARNING CRIES

A fragment of a marble frieze shows several Capitoline geese flapping their wings and honking to warn the Romans that the Gauls were coming. Archaeological Museum, Ostia

DEA/ALBUM



#### ► WATCHING THE PARADE

Romans celebrate the sacred geese as they are paraded through the streets to celebrate their defense of the city, in an engraving.

MARY EVANS/AGE FOTOSTOCK

# PALMYRA

## COSMOPOLITAN CROSSROADS

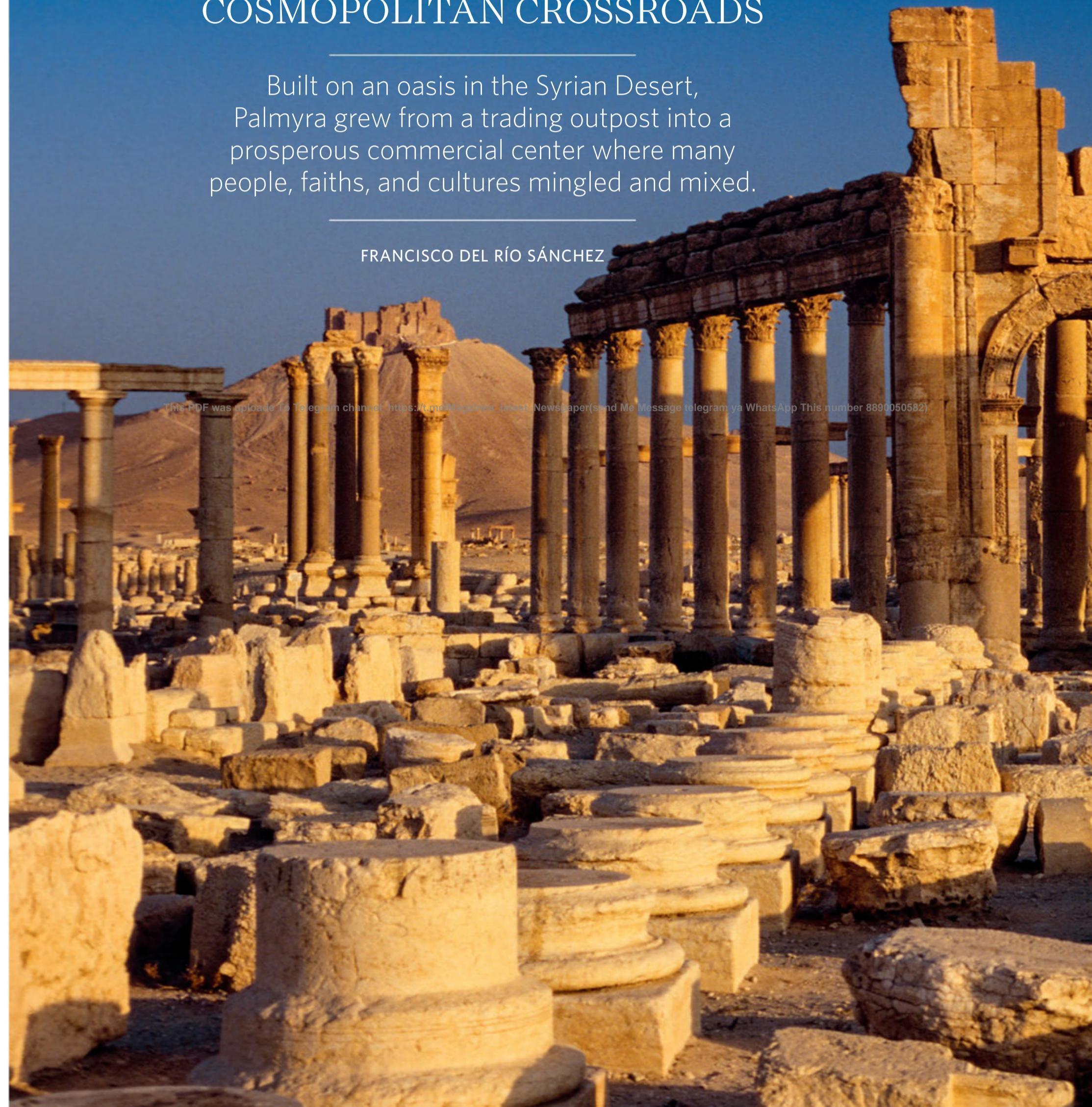
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Built on an oasis in the Syrian Desert, Palmyra grew from a trading outpost into a prosperous commercial center where many people, faiths, and cultures mingled and mixed.

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FRANCISCO DEL RÍO SÁNCHEZ

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### ARCH OF TRIUMPH

Photographed before its destruction by ISIS in 2015, Palmyra's monumental arch stood at one end of a great colonnaded road that ran through the ancient city.

MATTHIEU VERDEIL/GTRES



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#### DIVINE EAGLE

Sacred to the god Baal Shamin, eagles, like the one above, adorned the walls of Baal Shamin's temple in Palmyra. Relief, Louvre Museum, Paris

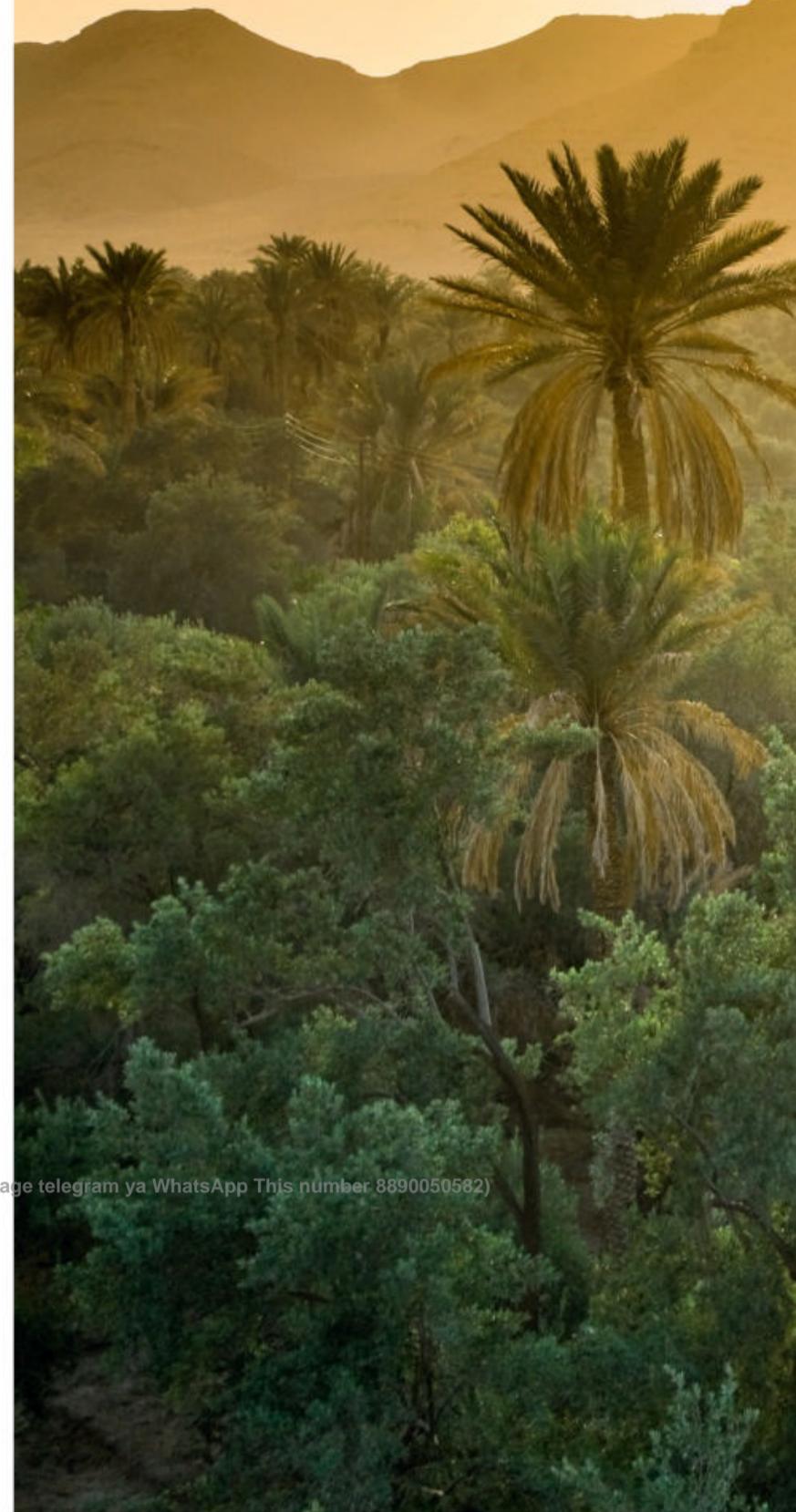
F. RAUX/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

Ancient Palmyra became a thriving, cosmopolitan capital of trade thanks to its geography. The city's history stretches back to the second millennium B.C., when inscriptions referred to it by its original name, Tadmur. (The city's name would change when it came under Roman influence around 64 B.C.) Surrounded by mountains and desert, Tadmur, located some 130 miles northeast of modern Damascus, blossomed atop a lush oasis complete with groves of palm trees. Both a natural spring, the Efqa, and a wadi watered the city, allowing it to grow and become a vital stop along the trade routes between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. Caravans met, and people developed innovative styles of art and architecture that reflected multiple cultural influences.

Historic records show Tadmur possessed a cosmopolitan quality from the start. Writers from other places mentioned it, like the great 11th-century Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser in his annals. Tadmur appears in works from other ancient Syrian cities, such as Mari (modern Tall Hariri) and Emar (Mas-kanah). This quality can be attributed to the city's strategic location and its water supply.

Tadmur became known as Palmyra when it came under Roman influence in the mid-first century B.C. Syria had become a colony of Rome in 64 B.C., but Palmyra remained independent. In the next three centuries, the city would reach its peak, and some 200,000 people would call it home. As wealth poured into the city, monumental architecture rose

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to the sky. Like Palmyra itself, the architecture bore influences of the many cultures that moved through the city, as artistic, spiritual, and linguistic traditions met and meshed. For the next two centuries, Palmyra was one of the most prosperous trading centers in the ancient world.

## Palmyra Prospects

### A.D. 14

During the reign of Emperor Tiberius, the Roman Empire gains control of Palmyra and incorporates it into the province of Syria.

### 32

The glorious Temple of Bel, a Mesopotamian sky god, is dedicated in Palmyra and becomes a center of spiritual life in the city.

### 129

Emperor Hadrian visits Palmyra and grants it "free city" rights, kicking off the most prosperous period of Palmyra's history.



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Columns are off here. Alignment is weird.

## Caravans on Their Way

Palmyra's lingua franca was Aramaic, a Semitic language spoken across the ancient world. Archaeologists have found two systems of writing being employed. One is a monumental script and the other a Mesopotamian cursive, showing influences from both the Mediterranean

### CITY OF PALMS

Efqa is the natural spring that waters the Palmyra oasis and allows its famous palm trees (above) to flourish.

MICHELE FALZONE/AWL IMAGES

and Mesopotamian worlds. The Tariff of Palmyra, discovered in 1881, wonderfully showcases the dual influences. The stone tablet is written in Greek and Aramaic and lists the taxes due on different imports and exports.

The tariff dates to the time of Emperor Hadrian, around A.D. 137, when Palmyra sat between the Roman Empire of the west and Parthian Empire of the east. More than 40 inscriptions discovered in the city reveal both the organization and extent of Palmyra's trade. The Palmyrenes exchanged goods not only with Rome and Egypt to the west but also with Mesopotamia, India, and China to the east.

As the main stop of the great trading route between the Mediterranean and Asia, Palmyra drew its wealth from the caravan trade in spices,

131

The Temple of Baal Shamin is dedicated. Its architecture blends Greco-Roman and Eastern influences.

137

Inscribed in Greek and Aramaic, the Tariff of Palmyra's installation in the agora is a testament to the importance of commerce.

### 1 TEMPLE OF BEL

Palmyra's largest structure was a temple dedicated to the city's main divinity, the sky god Bel.

### 2 MONUMENTAL ARCH

Triangular in plan, the arch aligned with the Temple of Bel. It was decorated with carved botanical and geometric reliefs.

### 3 TEMPLE OF NABU

Seated on a podium of large ashlar, this temple was dedicated to Nabu, the Babylonian god of writing.

### 4 THEATER

Built in the second century A.D. in the Roman style, this venue could accommodate around 4,000 spectators.



**5 SENATE**

Palmyra's governing bodies would meet in this small building, which had a central peristyle.

**6 AGORA**

A large central courtyard was surrounded by limestone porticoes on all four sides.

**7 TETRAPYLON**

This junction between the two main roads was made up of four pavilions, each formed of four pink granite columns.

**8 TEMPLE OF BAAL SHAMIN**

This impressive structure built for a Phoenician god and lord of the skies was dedicated in A.D. 131.

⑧

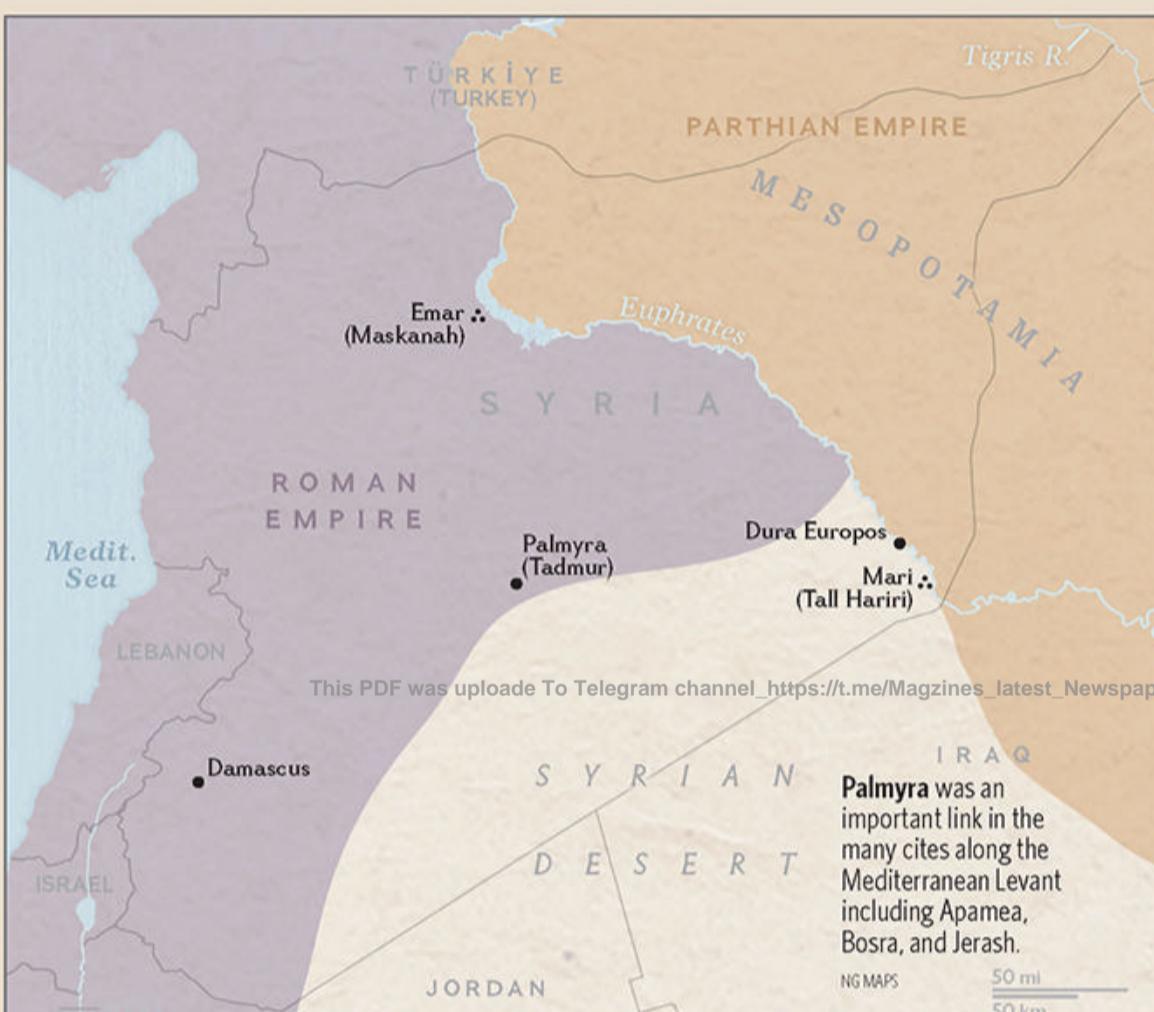
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**CITY LIFE**

# Streets of Palmyra

**THIS RECONSTRUCTION** shows what Palmyra might have looked like in its heyday in the second and third centuries A.D. The monumental city planning of the second century is evident in the great processional route that connected the Palmyra's main entrance with the Temple of Bel. This boulevard divided the city into two sectors: a southern portion, where the luxurious homes of the rich merchants and most of the temples were concentrated, and a large northern neighborhood, where the majority of the population lived.

ILLUSTRATION: RISE STUDIO



## Crime Along The Trade Routes

**TRADING CARAVANS** traveling to and from Palmyra not only had to cross the hostile desert, but they also had to be on alert for bandits. According to an inscription found in the city, dated June, A.D. 144, a group of Palmyrene merchants honored a fellow citizen named So'adu bar Bolyada for saving a trading caravan from these gangs of thieves. The traders were returning from the city of Vologesias, to the east, when they were attacked by a group of Bedouins in the Euphrates desert. Bar Bolyda left Palmyra with a great force and confronted Abdallat of Ahitaya and his gang of bandits, who had long been lying in wait to rob the caravan. Bar Bolyada's reputation for heroism would earn him at least 17 honorary statues in Palmyra and surrounding cities.



silks, works of art, and other goods. Typically, the city relied on two great annual expeditions, one in early spring and the other in autumn, between the Persian capital and the Persian Gulf.

As they made their way across the punishing desert, trading caravans faced another danger besides the harsh elements: bandits. Inscriptions warned that bands of thieves would steal goods to sell at their own emporiums. Some texts record the names of the Bedouin ring-leaders who were heads of the notorious raiding gangs, as well as the places where they would lie in wait for caravans to pass. The Palmyrenes hit back with their own rapid response forces. Merchants, whose goods were being transported, paid locals who knew the desert and could offer protection against bandit attacks.



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Getting a caravan and its cargo across the perilous desert intact took months of preparation. Prominent merchants would come together to negotiate a joint expedition. They procured camels from the desert nomads and cajoled the nomads to their side to help avoid bandit attacks. Even so, a caravan traveled with its own armed militia commanded by a trusted and experienced warlord.

### Divine Blessings

Palmyra's esteem of trade was reflected in its religious beliefs and practices. It seems that the Palmyrenes' relationship with their gods was similar to an exchange of goods. According to some inscriptions, being honest and shrewd in business was a great virtue. So, those who excelled

in organizing and defending caravans became an example of morality and piety. Their statues occupied a prominent place in the city's temples.

For example, in the Great Colonnade that runs through the city, a statue was erected in honor of Julius Aurelius Zenobius. Inscriptions recorded that he had been "commander at the time of arrival of the divine Alexander" and "overseer also of the distribution of corn, a liberal man, not sparing even of his own private property, and conducting his public service with distinction, so that he has been blessed by the god Yarhibol and by Julius Priscus, the most illustrious prefect and sacred praetor."

When people turned to the divinities, it was generally to ask for material or economic benefits or to give thanks for those already received.

### TEMPLE OF BEL

Photographed in 2009, the inner sanctuary survived for millennia before its destruction by ISIS in 2015. Today, only the great gateway remains standing.

NICK LAING/AWL IMAGES

## SACRED STRUCTURE

# The Temple of Bel

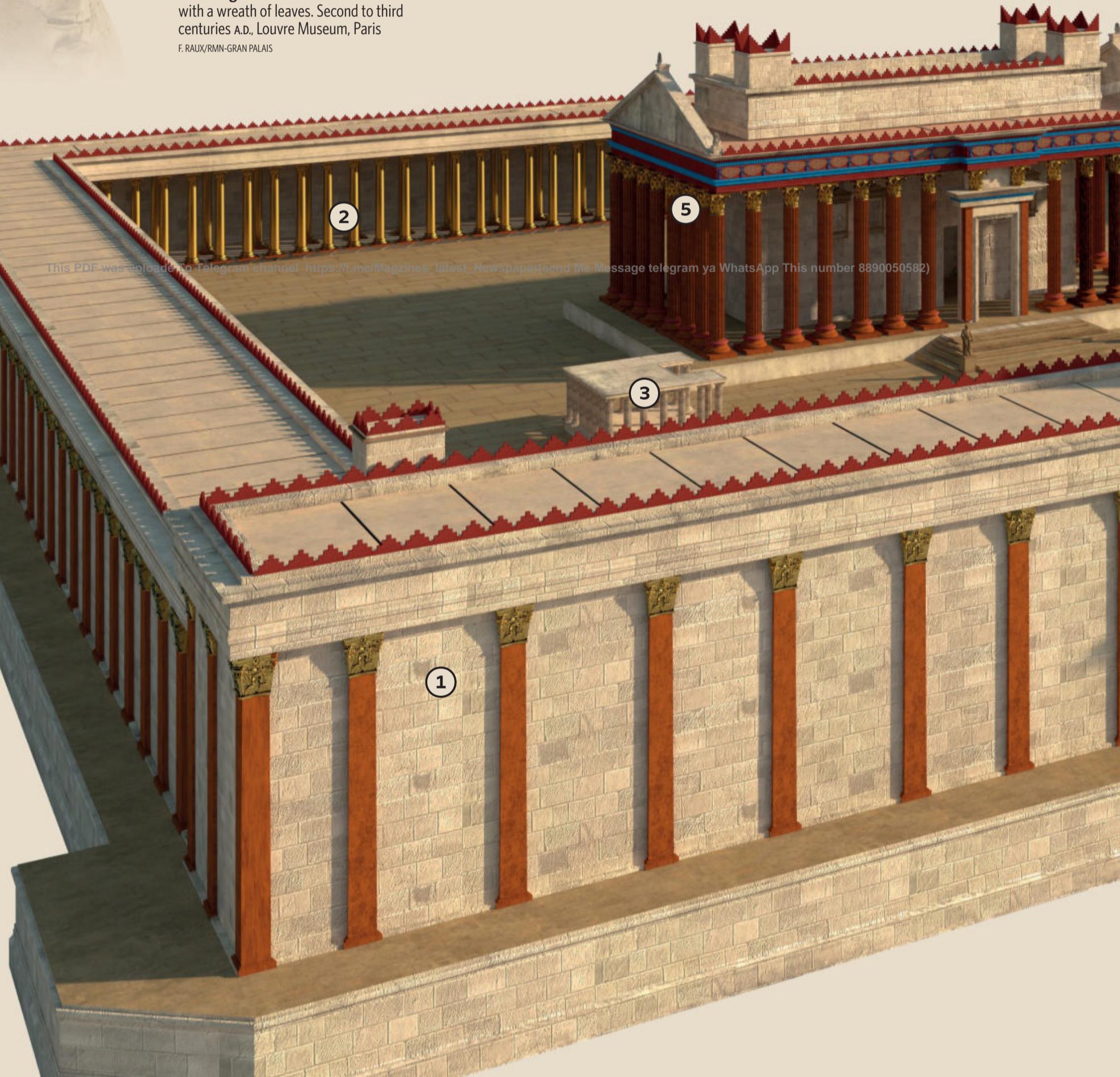
**THIS SANCTUARY, DEDICATED IN A.D. 32,** served Bel, the main divinity of Palmyra. The largest monument in the city, it was surrounded by ① a wall topped with triangular, stepped merlons and standing 50 feet tall at its highest point. The main entrance gave access to ② the sacred enclosure, a large courtyard with double-columned porticoes.

In addition to the main building, there was ③ an altar for animal sacrifices and ④ a sacred pool where priests performed their ablutions. In the center of the enclosure stood ⑤ Bel's sanctuary. This central structure combined Greco-Roman elements, such as the columns, with Persian attributes, such as the roof.

**A male figure wears** a headdress decorated with a wreath of leaves. Second to third centuries A.D., Louvre Museum, Paris

F. RAUX/RMN-GRAN PALAIS

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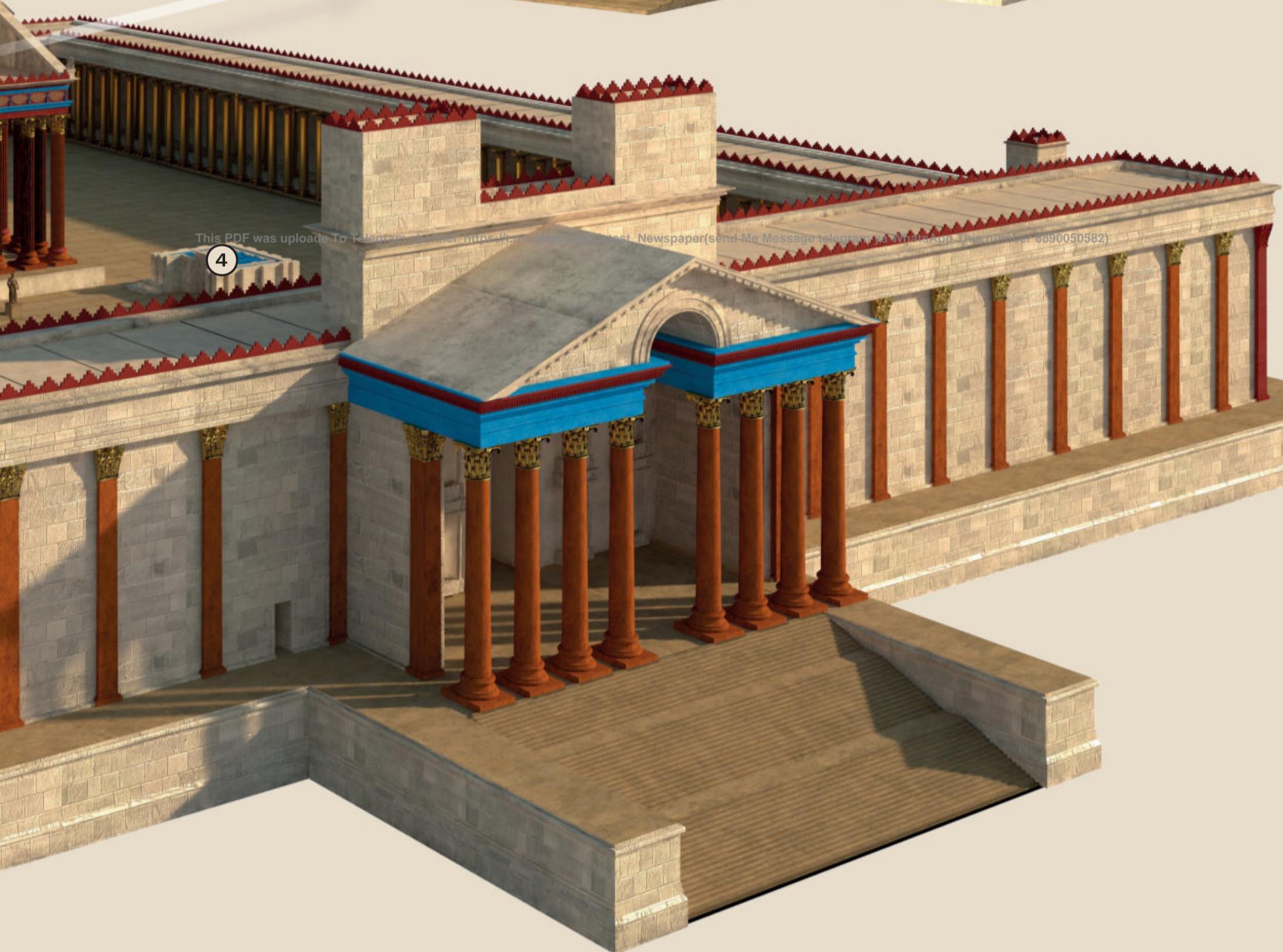


## THE SANCTUARY

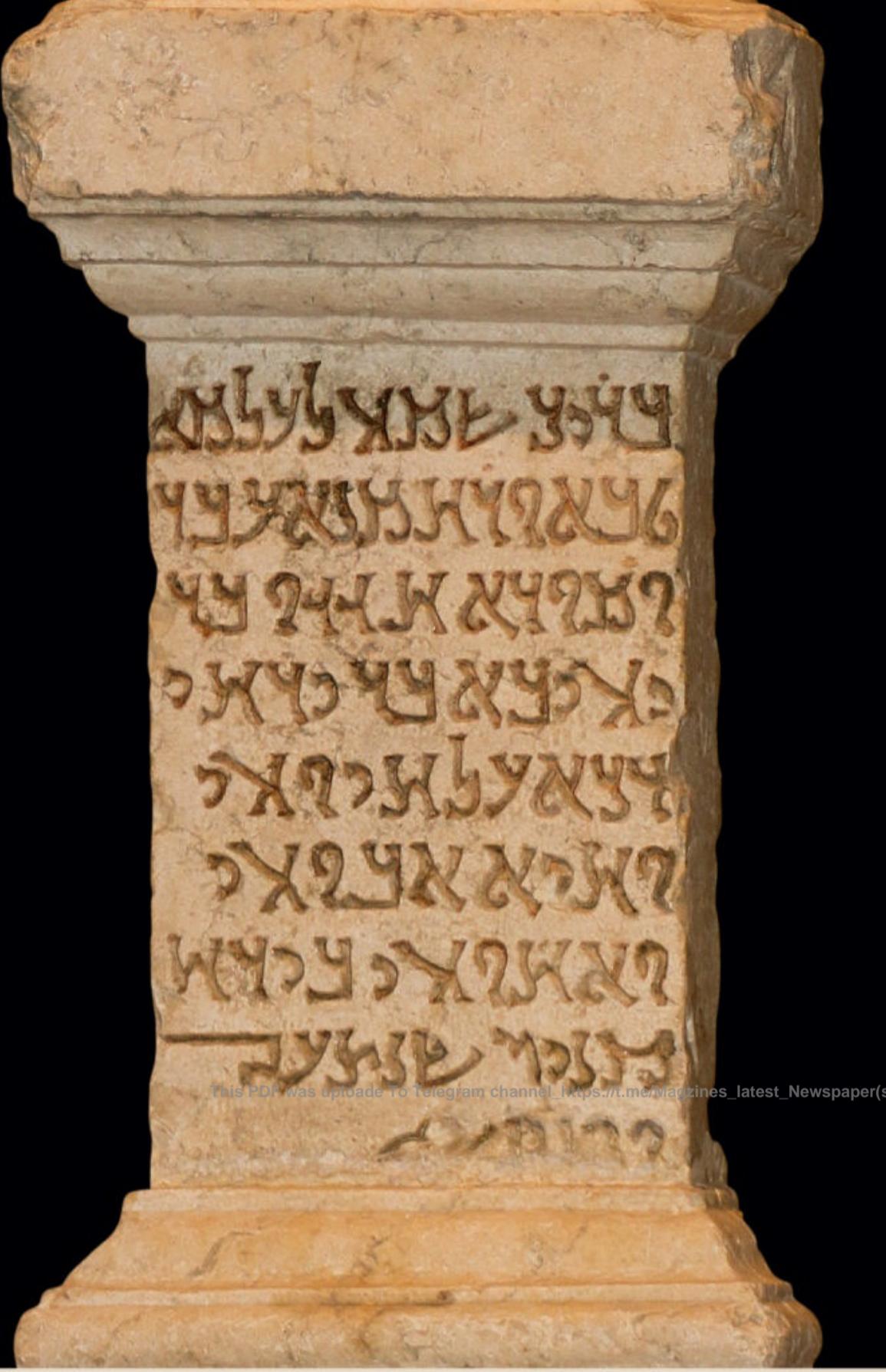
This portion of the temple was surrounded by columns with Corinthian capitals.

The only room in the temple was the cella, some 42 feet wide, where the statue of Bel was kept. The roof of this building was not gabled, as in Greek temples, but flat, which meant it could be walked upon.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RISE STUDIO



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## Worshipping the God With No Name

**HUNDREDS OF SMALL ALTARS** have been found around Palmyra with intriguing inscriptions addressed to an unnamed deity. All of them offer up praise—"he whose name is blessed forever," "lord of the universe," "the good and merciful"—to the god while never naming him directly. The god's identity has puzzled scholars for years, but Polish archaeologist Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider of the University of Wrocław believes that there was no single anonymous god. The Palmyra inscriptions used language similar to hymns sung in the centuries before Mesopotamia; these ancient songs often thanked multiple deities rather than one. Leaving the Palmyrene altars' messages of gratitude more open-ended continued that tradition, since so many of their gods went by different epithets and names.

**Palmyra altar, circa A.D. 232, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

MET/ALBUM

Cult practice was built around trying to secure favorable trading conditions from the gods, often within a family context. Numerous funerary reliefs and sculptures have been discovered in which the deceased are represented in their prime and dressed in their best clothes. The tombs in Palmyra's cemeteries were richly decorated with sculptures of the deceased. These moving works of art blend Greco-Roman realism with Parthian influences and fashion.

### Diverse Deities

Palmyrene cosmology was also multicultural, drawing on the faiths of the different peoples who came to the city. In the Palmyrene pantheon, the supreme god was Bel, probably called Bol in the local language. Originally Bel was a protective divinity of the oasis and took on attributes of the Greek god Zeus. His main temple complex in the city was very similar in shape and layout to the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem.

Palmyra's religion was not monotheistic, like that of Yahweh. There were many deities, some local and some from other cultures. Along with Bel, and forming a kind of supreme triad, were Yarhibol and Aglibol, a moon god native to northern Syria. Baal Shamin, lord of the skies, was of Phoenician origin, and Atargatis, goddess of fertility, came from the Syrophenician area. Besides Zeus, other Greek gods and heroes, such as Hercules and Nemesis, were assimilated, as were gods from Mesopotamia, North Africa, and nomadic Arab cultures.

Standing at the crossroads where gods, peoples, and languages met, Palmyra enjoyed more cultural diversity than almost anywhere in the ancient world. In this thriving oasis, people from different places with very different traditions succeeded in cocreating a culture based on pragmatism and a passion for trade, accepting one another and their gods.

### Protecting the Past

Palmyra diminished in importance after a third-century rebellion, led by the Palmyrene queen Zenobia, destroyed the city. It was rebuilt but never recaptured its former glory. As



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the city declined, its monuments and buildings fell into ruin. The grandeur of Bel's great temple and that of Baal Shamin kept them in use; both became churches. The Temple of Bel became a mosque in the 12th century.

The world's attention returned to Palmyra in the 18th century, when visiting scholars published detailed drawings of its gorgeous architecture. Excavations began in earnest in the 20th century, as archaeologists descended on the site to explore its ancient wonders. Palmyra proved invaluable in studying the economic and cultural interactions of the world in the first 300 years of the Roman Empire, and it became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1980.

The world's attention was drawn back to Palmyra during the Syrian civil war, when ISIS

seized it in May 2015. Control would change hands several times, but Syria ultimately regained possession in 2017. By then, ISIS had damaged the Roman theater, destroyed the Bel and Baal Shamin temples, and looted treasures from the city. Syrian officials have pledged to restore what was lost in the hopes that the world can again experience one of history's first multicultural centers. ■

#### DIVINE TRIO

Aglibol, god of the moon (left), Baal Shamin, lord of the skies (center), and Malakbel, a sun god (right), stand side by side on this circa first-century A.D. relief. Louvre, Paris

ALAMY/ACI

FRANCISCO DEL RÍO SÁNCHEZ IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ARAB AND ISLAMIC STUDIES AT THE COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY, MADRID, SPAIN.

*Learn more*

*Pearl of the Desert: A History of Palmyra*  
Rubina Raja, Oxford University Press, 2022

# PALMYRENE PORTRAITS

Adorning the tombs of Palmyra's wealthiest inhabitants were carefully rendered busts and reliefs of the deceased. The sculptures presented their subjects at their best—well dressed and coiffed in the fashion of the city. They combine Greco-Roman costume with elements of Persian-Sasanian influence, such as the facial expressions of the eyes and types of adornment. They were originally brightly painted, but only traces of their colors remain.

**A bearded man** appears before his camel, a sign that he is a merchant by trade. Relief, A.D. 160, Glyptotek, Copenhagen

**A young girl** holds a branch and a bird, icons often seen on Palmyrene children's tombstones. Relief, A.D. 150-200, Palmyra Museum

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A finely dressed man holds a game bird with one hand and his brother's arm with the other. Relief, second century A.D., Palmyra Museum



A stylish woman adorned with jewelry rests her hand on her face, a common gesture in Palmyrene women's funerary portraits. Relief, third century A.D., Pigorini Museum, Rome



Four finely dressed figures pose as though they are attending a funeral banquet. Second to third centuries A.D., Palmyra Museum

A caravan of camels and horses wear jeweled harnesses while carrying their wealthy riders. Relief, A.D. 100-150, Cleveland Museum of Art

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE): FROM THE GARDENS/AURIMAGES; BRIDGEMAN/ACI; SCALA, FLORENCE; BRIDGEMAN/ACI; FROM THE GARDENS/AURIMAGES; WOLFGANG SAUBER

ESPIONAGE AND INTRIGUE

# HARRIET THE SPY

Best known as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman continued the fight for freedom by serving with the Union Army and spying on the Confederacy in South Carolina.

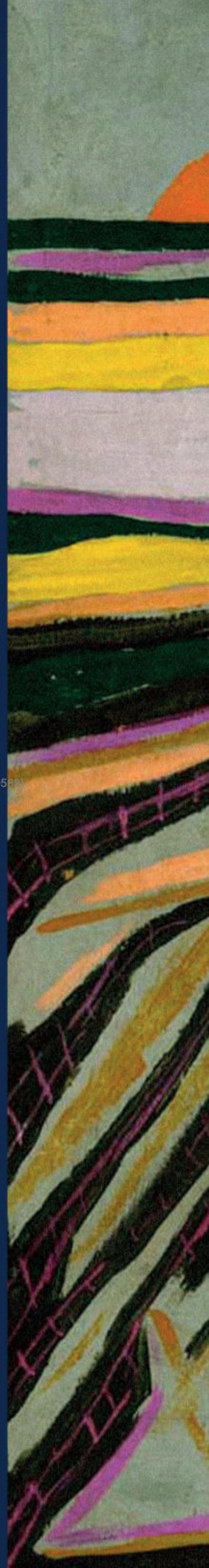
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AMY E. BRIGGS



**Right:** William H. Johnson based his portrait of Harriet Tubman on the frontispiece of her 1886 biography. Smithsonian American Art Museum.  
**Above:** The Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York, issued pins as souvenirs in the 1950s.

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## MARYLAND BEGINNINGS

Tidal wetlands were the backdrop to Tubman's early life in Dorchester County, Maryland. Today the wetlands are part of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge.

DRNADIG/GETTY

**A**ny student of American history is no stranger to Harriet Tubman. Called the Moses of Her People, Tubman famously escaped slavery herself in 1849 and then returned to guide family and friends to freedom along the Underground Railroad. She freed dozens of people through her work in the 1850s. Perhaps her most significant, but less celebrated, contributions came during the Civil War, when she worked for the Union as a nurse, soldier, and spy.

Tubman's skills and abilities, honed in the backwoods of Maryland as she spirited people north, were crucial to penetrating slave-holding

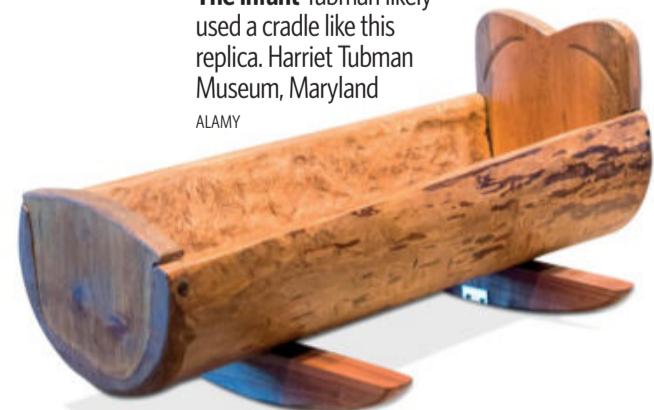
power in South Carolina and delivering a devastating blow to the Confederacy. In one night, she led a mission that freed hundreds.

## Growing Up

The middle child of nine siblings, Tubman was born in Dorchester County, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, around 1822. Her parents, Harriet "Rit" Green and Ben Ross, named their daughter Araminta. Both Rit and Ben were enslaved, as were all their children. Tubman later recalled how Rit often told her children Bible stories, which led to Tubman's deep, lifelong Christian faith.

**The infant** Tubman likely used a cradle like this replica. Harriet Tubman Museum, Maryland  
ALAMY

## SLAVERY AND FREEDOM



CA 1822

In Dorchester County, Maryland, Harriet Tubman is born to enslaved parents who name her Araminta "Minty" Ross.

1849

Tubman escapes from slavery and travels north to freedom in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1850-1860

As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Tubman rescues more than 70 people from slavery in Maryland.



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As early as age five, Araminta began being “hired out” for work in other households. In her own telling, it was a brutal experience, full of violence and physical abuse at the hands of her enslavers. She later remembered how one mistress would whip her almost every morning before work. Another incident, in which she was hit in the head with a lead weight, left her with a serious injury; she would be plagued for the rest of her life by painful headaches and debilitating seizures.

As a child, Araminta often worked in domestic settings, caring for children, cooking, and cleaning. After she turned 12, Araminta moved

## PORTRAIT OF A LADY

**TOUGHNESS, DETERMINATION, AND RESILIENCE**—all of these factors contributed to Harriet Tubman’s many successes on the Underground Railroad and her work during the Civil War. They are all plainly visible in a photograph of her, recently discovered in 2019. Taken around 1868 when Tubman was in her 40s, it was found inside a photo album that belonged to abolitionist Emily Howland, a colleague of Tubman’s from New York. Fashionably dressed in a ruffled shirt and checkered skirt, Tubman looks directly at the camera—her expression serious and her gaze piercing. Her posture is both composed and relaxed. From the photograph, it is hard to tell that Tubman only stood around five feet tall, because she radiates strength and vitality. Prior to the discovery, confirmed photographs of Tubman were taken when she was older and often appeared diminutive and frail. These later images left her youthful appearance to the imagination, but this photograph reveals how she looked during her courageous exploits in her prime.

1861

1863

After the Civil War breaks out, Tubman joins Union forces stationed at Fort Monroe in Virginia.

After establishing a spy network in South Carolina, Tubman leads a raid on plantations along the Combahee River.

**Harriet Tubman** photographed around 1868 by Benjamin F. Powelson in Auburn, New York. National Museum of African American History and Culture

ALBUM/HERITAGE ART



## PLAN OF FORTRESS MUNROE VI 1862.

Area of outside walls 65 acres. Granite walls 35 ft. high Embrasures intended for 42 ft. thick 75 to 150 ft wide. Tide ebbs and flows in Bight 8 to 15 ft daily. 42 embrasures  
Star garrison - 2450 men Cost \$ 2,400,000 90 of guns 1862 371

Many embrasures were enlarged and heavier guns mounted [some 200 per Parrot] in 1862

The fort was planned by Genl Simon Bernard Corps of Engineers formerly and Officer of French Army under Napoleon  
The foundations of the fort were laid in March 1819 under Major Charles Gratiot. The fort was first  
occupied by Battery C. 3rd U.S. Artillery June 1823. Capt. M. P. Sommier Commanding U.S.A.  
The fort was occupied by a small fort as early as 1608.

# FINDING FREEDOM AT THE FORTRESS

**FORT MONROE** sits on a jutting piece of land known as Point Comfort. In 1619 it was where the first enslaved Africans landed in Virginia—the starting point for the history of slavery in the United States. More than 200 years later, this place would be instrumental in its ending. In May 1861 three men—Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James Townsend—escaped slavery and arrived at Fort Monroe, which was under Union control despite being in Virginia. Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler, the fort's commander, met with the men and learned that their enslaver, Col. Charles Mallory, was forcing them to build Confederate fortifications. The colonel demanded the men's return under the Fugitive Slave Act, but Butler refused. He pointed out that since Virginia claimed to have seceded, the act did not apply. Baker, Mallory, and Townsend were free to stay at Fort Monroe. Word of Butler's actions quickly spread to other enslaved people in Virginia, and by the end of the Civil War, more than 10,000 Black Americans gained their freedom through the fort.

**Map of Fort Monroe, 1862.** This colorful map shows how Fort Monroe and the surrounding area looked during Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's command.

THE PROTECTED ART ARCHIVE/ALAMY

outside to work in the fields. She was not tall, but she was very strong, able to lift heavy barrels, chop wood, and till the soil.

When Araminta was in her early 20s, she married John Tubman, a free Black man, and changed her name to Harriet. Even though her husband was free, Harriet Tubman was not. Like most enslaved people, she and her family were in constant risk of being split up if their owners decided to sell.

### Spreading Freedom

Harriet Tubman's successful escape in 1849 was fueled by such fears; her enslaver, Edward Brodess, died suddenly, and there were rumors that his widow was going to sell Tubman and her siblings. Rather than let the widow decide her fate, Tubman struck out on her own and found her way north to Philadelphia.

For the next 11 years, Tubman did her best known work in the causes of freedom and human rights. She became an important figure in abolitionist circles (although she was not fond of public speaking) and became allies with prominent antislavery figures, including noted speaker Frederick Douglass and the radical John Brown (who so admired her bravery and tactics that he called her General Tubman).

Through her leadership on the Underground Railroad, Tubman returned south to Maryland many times and rescued more than 70 enslaved people, including members of her own family. She helped them relocate to free states like Pennsylvania and New York and even farther north to Canada.

Known as Moses, Tubman relied on careful planning and information networks. Tubman was familiar with the Maryland landscape, rivers, and night sky, which helped her navigate north. She shrewdly began journeys on Saturday nights, since runaway notices could not appear in local newspapers until Monday. She carried a pistol, both for protection from slave catchers and to urge her passengers forward if they decided to turn back. "You'll be free or die," she said. Later in her life, Tubman proudly recalled, "I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say: I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger."



#### WHERE THE HEART IS

Drawn to Auburn, New York, as a hub of abolitionism, Tubman purchased a home there in 1859. The original wood-frame house later burned down and was replaced by this brick structure.

NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE

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## War Efforts

After the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Tubman volunteered her services to the Union. As a volunteer, she initially joined Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler and his Massachusetts troops, who were stationed at Fort Monroe, Virginia. Tubman's duties there were largely domestic. She worked as a nurse, cook, and laundress.

That May, a group of Black Americans fled their Virginia enslavers and took refuge at Fort Monroe. Early in the war, there was no universal approach about what to do with refugees like them, but General Butler took an aggressive stance. The Union was at war with the Confederacy, which meant that he could seize the property, including enslaved people, of enemies of the state.

Butler referred to the escapees as "contraband of war" and refused to turn over anybody who had fled from slavery and come to Fort Monroe. The contrabands, as they became known, would stay at the garrison. Four months into the war, there were more than a thousand of them living and working alongside Tubman.

In late 1861 Tubman returned to New England and Auburn, New York, to spend the winter and visit with her parents. (They had escaped Maryland in the 1850s and settled in New York with Tubman and other family members.) She looked forward to returning to the work at Fort Monroe and helping build the free Black community there in the spring, but Massachusetts Governor John Andrew had different plans.

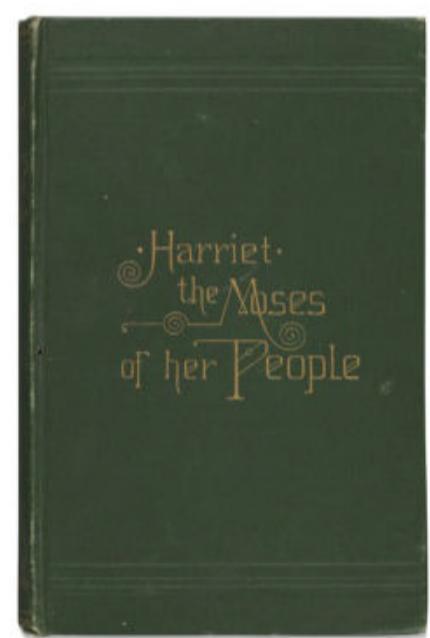
The Union had captured Port Royal, South Carolina, in early November 1861. The barrier island was an important strategic gain, giving the Union naval control of Port Royal Sound and the Sea Islands. Like Fort Monroe, Port Royal and the surrounding Beaufort area had become a haven for enslaved people fleeing the coastal plantations of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Governor Andrew asked Tubman to travel to Port Royal to aid the growing refugee community there in the Sea Islands. Tubman welcomed the new assignment, and, after getting her affairs in order at home, she departed in May 1862.

#### MODERN MOSES

Tubman worked with biographer and friend Sarah H. Bradford to tell her life story in *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*. The 1897 edition is shown below.

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**Above:** An unidentified soldier (possibly from a Maryland regiment) poses for a family portrait with his wife and daughters. **Upper right:** An unidentified Union corporal sits for the camera. **Lower right:** Two Union soldiers, possibly identified as brothers Baldy Guy (at left) and George Guy, sit together.

ALL PORTRAITS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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## ENLISTING IN THE WAR

**BLACK AMERICANS** had been clamoring to fight for the Union since the beginning of the Civil War. The first officially recognized soldiers served in the First Regiment South Carolina Volunteer Infantry. Because the Union had gained such a strong foothold in the Port Royal area, people were flocking there in droves to flee slavery. In August 1862 Gen. Rufus R. Saxton, the military governor of the region, saw a valuable opportunity in this growing population and began recruiting men after receiving the secretary of war's authorization. By January 1863, when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, the First South Carolina was nearly a thousand soldiers strong. Recruiting efforts continued, and the Second South Carolina, the unit that served with Harriet Tubman, was organized that month. In May 1863, the Bureau of United States Colored Troops was established, expanding recruitment across the nation. Fighting from Missouri to Tennessee to Virginia, nearly 180,000 Black Americans had enlisted to fight, making up about 10 percent of the Union Army. Sixteen of them would be awarded the Medal of Honor for their service.

### Freedom Fighters

When the war began in April 1861, free Black people had limited opportunities to contribute to the war effort, especially on the battlefield. Despite having fought for independence in 1776 and in the War of 1812, Black Americans were excluded from fighting for the Union. This perplexing stand was largely because of politics. Many Republican leaders wanted abolition, but President Lincoln feared that the so-called border states, where slavery remained legal, would secede if the issue took center stage.

Critics, including Tubman, loudly pointed out the obvious contradiction with this position. Frederick Douglass noted in May 1861, just a month into the war: "There is but one easy, short and effectual way to suppress and put down the desolating war ... Fire must be met with water, darkness with light, and war for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery."

Following the precedent set by General Butler at Fort Monroe, Congress took a step forward by passing the First Confiscation Act in August



**Abraham Lincoln** presides over the first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation with his cabinet on July 22, 1862. This engraving by A.H. Ritchie is based on a painting by F.B. Carpenter.

INCAMERASTOCK/ALAMY

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1861. The act made it the Union's policy to seize property, including enslaved people, supporting the Confederate military. A few short months later, Secretary of War Simon Cameron was publicly advocating that all contrabands should be unconditionally freed and allowed to enlist in the armed forces.

Lincoln still resisted this position, despite critics loudly proclaiming the practicality and necessity of allowing Black people to fight. Douglass knew that this investment would be key to future citizenship battles: "Once let the [B]lack man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States."

As the war dragged on, abolitionist voices grew louder and louder. Tubman's was among them. Her support of Lincoln had been luke-warm at best because of his cautious approach to slavery. Tubman wanted a quick, complete end to slavery and felt that the war was unwinnable

until abolition was the law of the land. She told a friend, "God won't let Mr. Lincoln beat the South till he does the right thing."

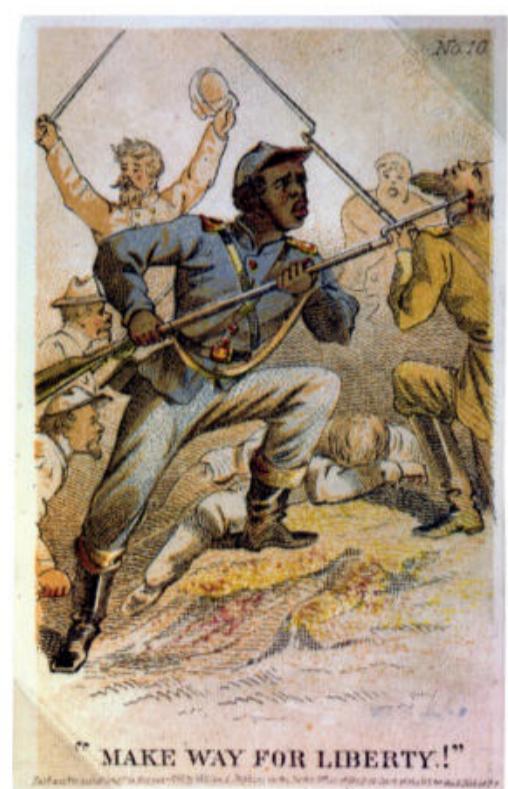
Union casualties mounted, and the U.S. government's attitude began to shift in 1862, when Republican senators observed that it was time for the military "to use all the physical force of this country to put down the rebellion." Two acts passed in July 1862 loosened regulations. "Persons of African descent" could now be employed "for any war service for which they may be found competent," although permission had to be secured for combat. The legislation also declared the enslaved people of anyone serving in the Confederacy "forever free."

Both acts laid the groundwork for the Emancipation Proclamation. It would be issued on September 22, 1862, and go into effect on January 1, 1863. All enslaved people in the Confederate states "are, and henceforward shall be free." The proclamation also settled the question of who

#### MAKE WAY!

This 1863 card (below), designed by Henry Louis Stephens, was part of a campaign to recruit Black soldiers into the Union army.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



"MAKE WAY FOR LIBERTY!"



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# COMBAHEE RIVER

**LOCATED SOME 20 MILES** south of Charleston, South Carolina, is a rich ecosystem created by the Ashepoo, Combahee (shown here), and Edisto Rivers. Known as the ACE Basin, this coastal river system consists of 1.1 million acres of wetlands and coastal islands where rice once flourished. Abandoned after the Civil War, the former plantations have become havens for wildlife, including white-tailed deer, foxes, and American alligators. Tidal creeks serve as habitat for fish and coastal birds like herons, egrets, and ducks.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION

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## RAID AT COMBAHEE FERRY

The success of the raid on Confederate supplies and homes along the Combahee River (seen in this wood engraving from *Harper's Weekly*) in June 1863 owed much to Tubman's advice and planning and her leadership of one of the raid parties.

EVERETT COLLECTION/BRIDGEMAN



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## ABOLITIONIST

A portrait from Col. James Montgomery's visiting card. He led the Combahee Raid alongside Tubman.

NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



could fight for the Union. Black American men could enlist in the Army and Navy.

## Joining the Fight

When the U.S. Army decided to let Black Americans fight, volunteer Black regiments arose in Tennessee, Massachusetts, Kansas, and South Carolina. Two Union colonels, Thomas Wentworth Higginson and James Montgomery, would command two of these regiments. They arrived in South Carolina, where Tubman was stationed. Both men were staunch abolitionists before the war and familiar with Tubman's work. Higginson knew her well, for he had met her in Massachusetts, and Montgomery knew her by reputation through their colleague John Brown. Both men quickly saw what an asset they had in her as a teammate.

During her first 10 months in South Carolina, Tubman had been mostly nursing the sick. Now the colonels wanted her to be more actively involved. Because of her experience guiding people on the Underground

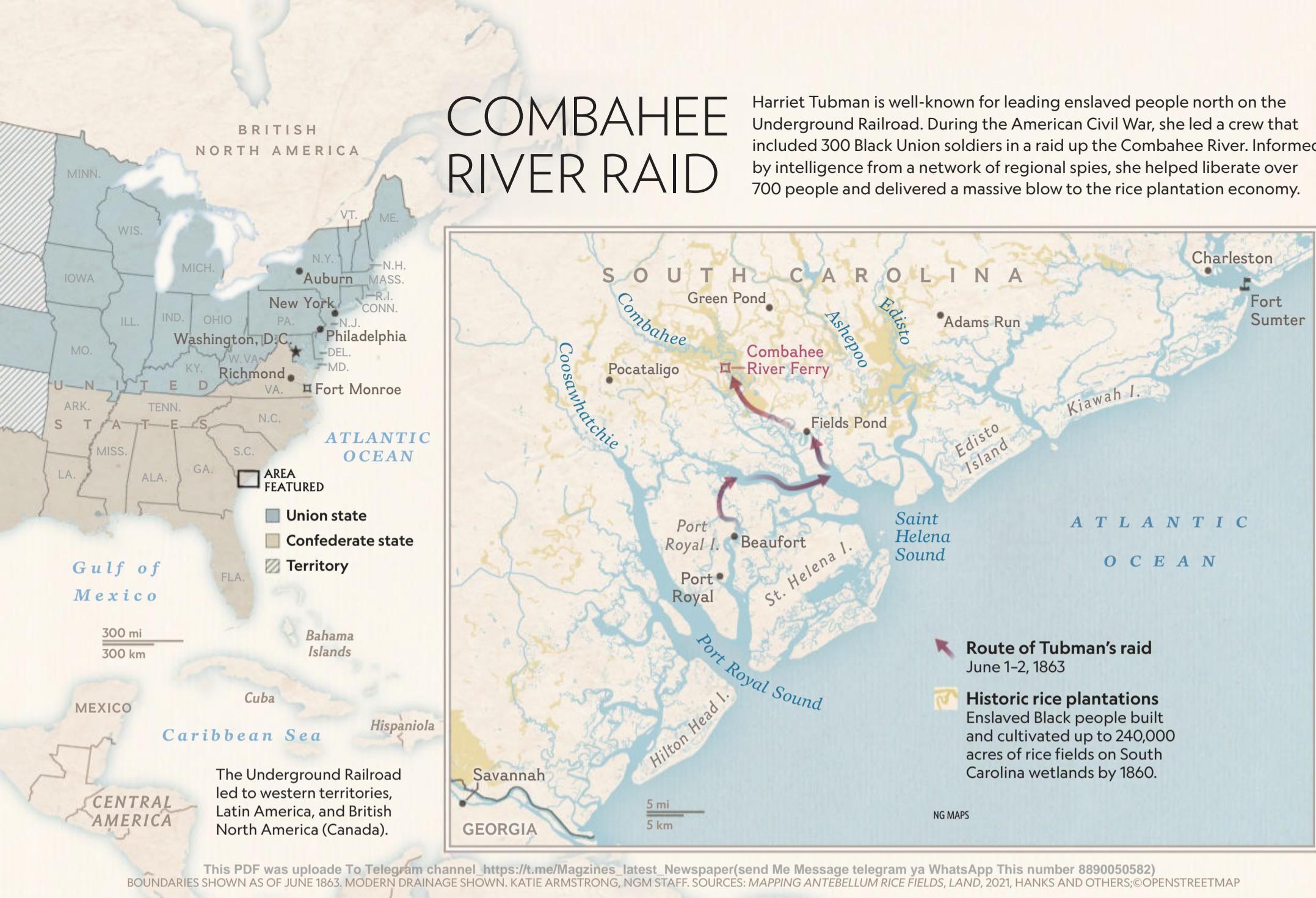
Railroad, the officers asked Tubman to form and lead a spy network in the region.

Tubman was willing, and her experience made her the perfect person to launch the network. Her biographer Catherine Clinton wrote, "Tubman had established such clandestine networks in the upper South during her Underground Railroad days and felt confident she might make similar headway in wartime Carolina." Tubman built a team of spies with many recruits from the local area around Beaufort. Her crew included Solomon Gregory, Mott Blake, Peter Burns, Gabriel Cahern, George Chisholm, Isaac Hayward, Walter Plowden, Charles Simmons, and Sandy Suffus.

This group collected intelligence from not only South Carolina but also farther south in Georgia and Florida. These spies would gather information from local enslaved people about Confederate plans, like where Confederate troops placed gunpowder-filled barrels in waterways to damage Union crafts. Information gained from these spies became known as Black dispatches.

# COMBAHEE RIVER RAID

Harriet Tubman is well-known for leading enslaved people north on the Underground Railroad. During the American Civil War, she led a crew that included 300 Black Union soldiers in a raid up the Combahee River. Informed by intelligence from a network of regional spies, she helped liberate over 700 people and delivered a massive blow to the rice plantation economy.



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BOUNDARIES SHOWN AS OF JUNE 1863. MODERN DRAINAGE SHOWN. KATIE ARMSTRONG, NG STAFF. SOURCES: MAPPING ANTEBELLUM RICE FIELDS, LAND, 2021, HANKS AND OTHERS; ©OPENSTREETMAP

## Raiding the Rebels

This early work led to Tubman's most daring mission. Working with her commander, Colonel Montgomery, the two planned an operation to raid Confederate supplies and homes along the Combahee River. Three ships and 300 Union soldiers left late in the evening of June 1, 1863, to sail up the river under the cover of darkness into the Low Country. Tubman's careful planning and intelligence gathering allowed the boats to avoid Confederate mines and slip by undetected.

In the early morning hours of June 2, the Union forces attacked, wreaking havoc on the rice plantations along the river. Tubman led her own raiding party of eight men, helping to liberate enslaved people and seize whatever resources they could. Tubman later recalled how people seemed to drop what they were doing when they realized the Yankees were there:

*I nebber see such a sight... Here you'd see a woman wid a pail on her head, rice a smokin' in it jus' as she'd taken it from de fire... One woman brought two pigs, a white one an' a*

## RICE ALONG THE RIVERS

**RICE WAS SOUTH CAROLINA'S MOST ICONIC** cash crop and had been since the colonial era. Plantations in the Low Country, especially the ones on the Combahee, were especially productive, largely because of the river's unique geography and the knowledge of the enslaved Africans who worked along the river. Rice plantations in this region relied on ocean tides for their irrigation. When the tides were high, fresh water in the rivers was pushed inland, which would raise water levels in the fields. When tides went out, water levels would drop. The Combahee had a higher volume of fresh water compared to other rivers in the area, which protected its crops from damaging brackish water that could come in with the tide. In addition to the Combahee waters, the people who farmed this land brought knowledge from their homelands in Africa. Many of the Black Americans who lived in South Carolina's Low Country descended from people who lived along the "Rice Coast" of Africa, which stretches from modern-day Senegal to Sierra Leone to Liberia. People had been farming rice there for thousands of years, and the techniques used in South Carolina are the same as those from Africa.

**GENERAL AFFIDAVIT**

State of _____	County of _____	, 1918:
On this _____ day of _____, A. D. 19_____, personally appeared before me, _____, a citizen of _____, in the County of _____, and State of _____, who Post-office address is _____, aged _____ years, a residence of _____, in the County of _____, and State of _____, whose Post-office address is _____.		
well known to be respectable and entitled to credit, and who, being duly sworn, deposed to the following:		
<p><i>(There follows a statement from the witness that he has knowledge of the facts to which they testify.)</i></p> <p><i>They claim against the U.S. for those damages received as nurse and cook for hospitals and as corroborate of several men (eight or nine) account of serving the late war of the rebellion under circumstances and orders of General Stanton Secretary of War, and of several Generals.</i></p> <p><i>I claim for injuries also named the sum \$2000.00 hundred dollars.</i></p> <p><i>The amount of expenses have been fully</i></p> <p><i>read over to you and are true to the best of my knowledge information and belief.</i></p>		
<p>I further declare that I have no interest in said case and am not concerned in its prosecution. and allowance,</p> <p><i>Hamiet &amp; Davis Sate Harriet Gibran mark</i></p> <p><small>(Signatures of Atlanta)</small></p> <p><small>(If Atlanta signature is two witnesses who write sign here)</small></p>		

# FIGHTING FOR A SOLDIER'S PAY

**HARRIET TUBMAN'S WORK** earned her great fame, but it didn't bring her much money. Despite serving the Union in several capacities during the war, Tubman was only paid \$200. At Fort Monroe and in Port Royal she nursed, housed, and assisted hundreds of Black refugees who were fleeing slavery. Gathering intelligence and leading the Combahee River Raid were operations well within the theater of war. During Reconstruction Tubman began actively crusading for a pension. Part of the challenge was that much of the documentation of Tubman's work was fragmented. To help Tubman, an Auburn banker named Charles P. Wood assembled a dossier on her military service, pulling together letters, military correspondence, and testimonials from Union officers who worked with her during the war. Wood submitted everything to the U.S. government to help Tubman obtain a proper pension for her service. The fight would take decades of relentless advocacy. Tubman's tenacity paid off in 1899, when the nation finally recognized the veteran's service and granted her a pension for her work as a nurse.

**General Affidavit** bearing Harriet Tubman's signature as part of the fight for her military pension, circa 1898. Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

*black one; we took 'em all on board; named de white pig Beauregard, and de black pig Jeff Davis.*

The raid was an unqualified success, striking a strong blow to one of the South's most important economic engines. Tubman estimated that she recruited around 100 soldiers from the refugees. Newspapers buzzed with accounts of the raid and its leaders, including Tubman. A Boston newspaper, the *Commonwealth*, trumpeted:

*Col. Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 [B]lack soldiers, under the guidance of a Black woman, dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow, destroying millions of dollars worth of commissary stores, cotton and lordly dwellings, and striking terror into the heart of rebeldom, brought off near 800 slaves and thousands of dollars worth of property, without losing a man or receiving a scratch.*

Tubman also described her triumph in a letter she dictated to a friend:

We weakened the Rebels somewhat on the Combahee River by taking and bringing away some 756 head of their most valuable live-stock, known up in your region as "contrabands," and this too without a single loss of life on our part, though we had good reasons to believe that a number of Rebels bit the dust.

It was a moment of triumph for Tubman, who many historians believe is the first American woman to lead troops in an armed attack. She would spend the summer helping the newly freed Americans begin their lives in Port Royal.

By the fall, Tubman's health had begun to wane, and she was granted leave to return to Auburn in spring 1864. She went back in March 1865, treating the wounded and sick in Virginia hospitals near Fort Monroe. Even after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, Tubman continued her work in the region, treating the sick and wounded through July before going back to New York for good.



**Harriet Tubman** (far left) stands next to her daughter Gertie and her husband Nelson Davis, together with other members of her family and household. Auburn, New York, 1880s.

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## Life After the War

Tubman's devotion to civil rights and humanitarian issues continued for decades after the war. On the national front, she worked for woman suffrage, while in Auburn she opened her home to those in need, especially formerly enslaved people.

Tubman's first husband died in 1851, leaving her free to remarry in 1869. Her second husband was a war veteran, 25-year-old Nelson Davis. In 1874 they adopted a daughter named Gertie. Tubman and her husband ran a seven-acre farm and a brickmaking business together until his death in 1888.

Despite her generosity, Tubman often lacked money. Her community in Auburn rallied around her. A white friend, Sarah H. Bradford, worked with Tubman on her biography in 1869, which earned roughly \$1,200. In the 1880s, Tubman and Bradford published a new edition entitled *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*.

During Reconstruction, Tubman began a decades-long battle to obtain a military pension for her service during the Civil War. It would

be a slow process, taking tremendous determination, before the government granted one in 1899. It was both a sign of the times and of the long struggle that would follow Reconstruction into the 20th century, as the nation backslid into another era of racial discrimination.

Tubman continued to fight for equality and fairness until her death in 1913. Hundreds attended her funeral in Auburn. She was buried with military honors in Fort Hill Cemetery, where her husband, brother, and father also rested. On the back of her headstone read a simple list of her accomplishments: "Heroine of the Underground Railroad," "Nurse and Scout in the Civil War," and "Servant of God, Well Done." ■

AMY E. BRIGGS IS THE EDITOR IN CHIEF OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC HISTORY.

### Learn more

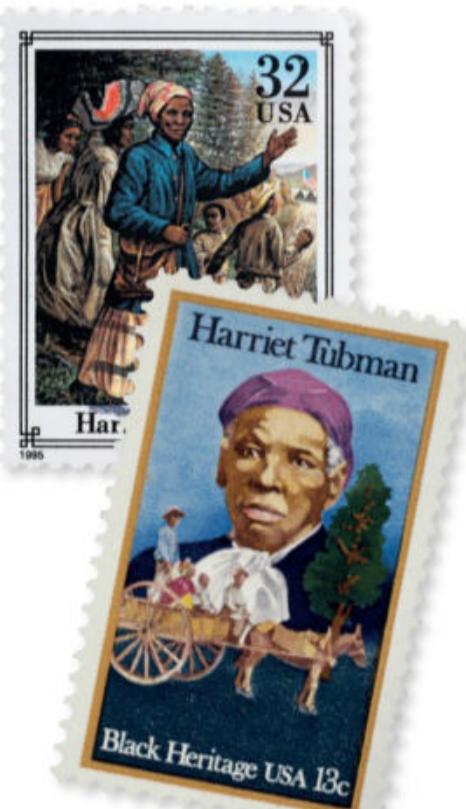
*Combee: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom during the Civil War*  
Edda L. Fields-Black, Oxford University Press, 2024

*Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*  
Catherine Clinton, Back Bay Books, 2005

## POSTHUMOUS HONOR

Two U.S. postage stamps have honored the life and work of Harriet Tubman: in 1995 (top) and 1978 (bottom).

ALAMY/ACI

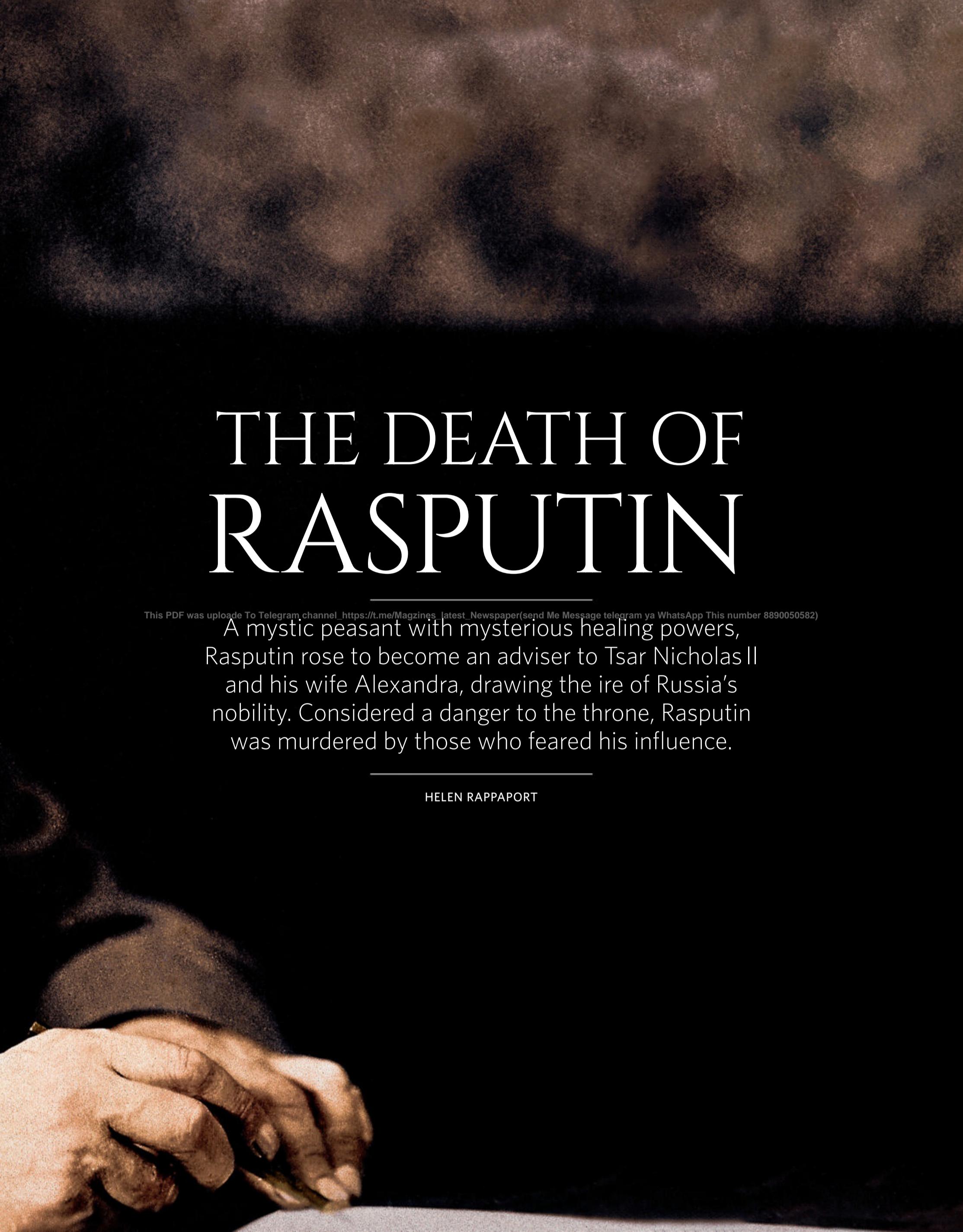


**PENETRATING  
STARE**

Photographed in the year of his death, Grigory Rasputin was famous for the intensity behind his piercing blue eyes, revealed in this colorized image.

MARY EVANS/AGE FOTOSTOCK

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# THE DEATH OF RASPUTIN

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A mystic peasant with mysterious healing powers, Rasputin rose to become an adviser to Tsar Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra, drawing the ire of Russia's nobility. Considered a danger to the throne, Rasputin was murdered by those who feared his influence.

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HELEN RAPPAPORT



## ONE OF THE (ROYAL) FAMILY

In a photograph taken around 1909, Rasputin poses with Tsarina Alexandra, her four daughters, her son, Alexei, and Alexei's nanny, Maria Vishnyakova (at bottom right).

ALAMY/ACI

NOTE: THE DATES CORRESPOND TO THE JULIAN CALENDAR THAT WAS IN USE IN RUSSIA AT THE TIME. THERE IS A 13-DAY LAG WITH RESPECT TO THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR USED NOW.



In the night of December 16–17, 1916, a murder took place at one of Russia's grandest palaces. The crime marked the culmination of an ugly, concerted campaign against both the victim and his imperial Russian patrons. It would rock the tsarist elite at a time when World War I was ravaging Europe and Russia was inexorably sliding toward revolution.

More than a hundred years later, the sensationalist reporting of the murder of Grigory Rasputin—for so long erroneously portrayed as a mad monk—has persisted in distorting the truth about his close relationship with Russia's last tsar and tsarina, Nicholas and Alexandra. How this lowly peasant and former horse dealer achieved such unique access to the



Princess Zinaida Yusupova (at left) and Grand Duchess Elizabeth Fyodorovna were both concerned about the tsarina's relationship with Rasputin.

FINE ART ALBUM

reclusive Romanovs alarmed the imperial inner circle, who demonized Rasputin and those who followed him.

## From Country to Court

Born in 1869 to peasant farmers, Grigory Yefimovich Rasputin grew up in Pokrovskoye—an obscure village in western Siberia some 1,600 miles from St. Petersburg. Little is known for sure about his upbringing, as records are scarce. At age 19, he married Praskovya Fyodorovna Dubrovina, who later bore him four children. When he left home in 1892, his family stayed

## ROYAL FAVORITE

1905

Nicholas II and Alexandra, the rulers of Russia, establish a relationship with Rasputin, a Siberian peasant with an aura of mysticism and healing.

1912

The rulers' son, Alexei, who has hemophilia, suffers a near-fatal hemorrhage at Spała, a town now in Poland. Alexandra and Nicholas believe that Rasputin has the power to relieve his symptoms.



Jewelry box with the portraits of Nicholas II and Alexandra, produced for the 1913 tercentenary of the Romanovs

D.BAYES/BRIDGEMAN/ACI

## CRISIS IN THE IMPERIAL FAMILY

# FAMILY CONCERNS

By 1916 the imperial family believed that Rasputin's influence over Tsarina Alexandra and Tsar Nicholas could be disastrous for Russia. On December 3, Alexandra's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth Fyodorovna (known as Ella) visited the tsar and his wife to warn them that Rasputin was leading the dynasty to disaster. The couple countered Ella's claims by saying Rasputin was a great and holy man; they advised her to drop the subject. Ella told her friend, Princess Zinaida Yusupov: "She drove me away like a dog." Zinaida could well understand the situation. When the princess had criticized Rasputin, Alexandra snapped at her: "I hope I never see you again!" Both women were keen to be rid of Rasputin, whatever it took. "Peaceful means won't change anything," Zinaida wrote in a letter to her son Felix Yusupov, the architect of Rasputin's death.

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behind. Rasputin is said to have experienced a religious epiphany and spent three months at a monastery, though he never became an ordained priest. Instead, he wandered Russia for several years seeking personal spiritual enlightenment—very much in the tradition of the itinerant Russian holy man.

By 1905 Rasputin had established himself in St. Petersburg as a spiritual guru and healer at a time when interest in alternative medicine and the occult were fashionable among Russia's elite. There, he gathered around himself a clique of adoring, mainly female, acolytes who revered

him as a man of God. But soon rumors began to circulate about Rasputin's libidinous behavior as a heavy drinker and sexual predator.

He led a strange and contradictory double life. In the presence of his admirers, he cultivated a persona that was sober, wise, and advocated purity of body and mind. While away from them, Rasputin would sometimes run riot as a drunken, sexual degenerate. Projecting a perpetual pious image was hard work; Rasputin was a deeply conflicted man, torn between his profound religious beliefs and a deep, rebellious compulsion to sin.

## MONUMENT TO THE MONK

A statue of Rasputin (below) stands in Tyumen, the Siberian city where, in 1914, he recovered from a murder attempt.

SHUTTERSTOCK



1915

After Nicholas leaves for the front line of World War I, Rasputin's influence over Alexandra increases. Rumors spread that Rasputin is controlling her and the government.

1916

Rasputin is assassinated on the night of December 16-17, in a plot hatched by Prince Felix Yusupov with the participation of Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, the tsar's cousin.

1917

After the February revolution, Rasputin's hastily dug grave is discovered. His corpse will be dug up and then cremated at the Petrograd Polytechnic Institute.

In 1792 Catherine the Great commissioned the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, Nicholas II's favorite imperial residence.

AGE FOTOSTOCK



#### PUPPET MASTER

Depicting him as the true ruler of Russia, a caricature (below) shows Rasputin manipulating Nicholas and Alexandra.

FINE ART ALBUM



The Russian public was already deeply suspicious of Rasputin when he was introduced to the tsar and tsarina in 1905. His reputation as a healer drew him in closer to the royal family because of the poor health of their son and heir, Tsarevitch Alexei, who suffered from hemophilia. In 1908 Rasputin allegedly used his abilities to ease Alexei's suffering during a severe episode. Alexandra saw Rasputin as a healer and relied on him to help in Alexei's care.

Rasputin, however, could not limit his role to health and spirituality. He also began offering political advice to both Nicholas and Alexandra. In doing so, he began making enemies for himself in the Russian aristocracy and government. Other members of the Romanov family despised Rasputin as a quack and con man. Alexandra became estranged from her

own sister, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Fyodorovna, after she warned the tsarina about Rasputin. The situation grew so dire that even Alexandra could not protect her beloved "Father Grigory" from the hatred of her own family and friends.

In 1915 World War I was raging, and Nicholas left Russia to spend time on the eastern front. Lonely and distraught, Alexandra began spending more and more time in Rasputin's company.



AFTER RASPUTIN'S DEATH and Nicholas's abdication, satirical cartoons mocked the tsar and tsarina by linking them to Rasputin's licentious influence. This one shows Rasputin as a drunken devil with the tsarina at his side.

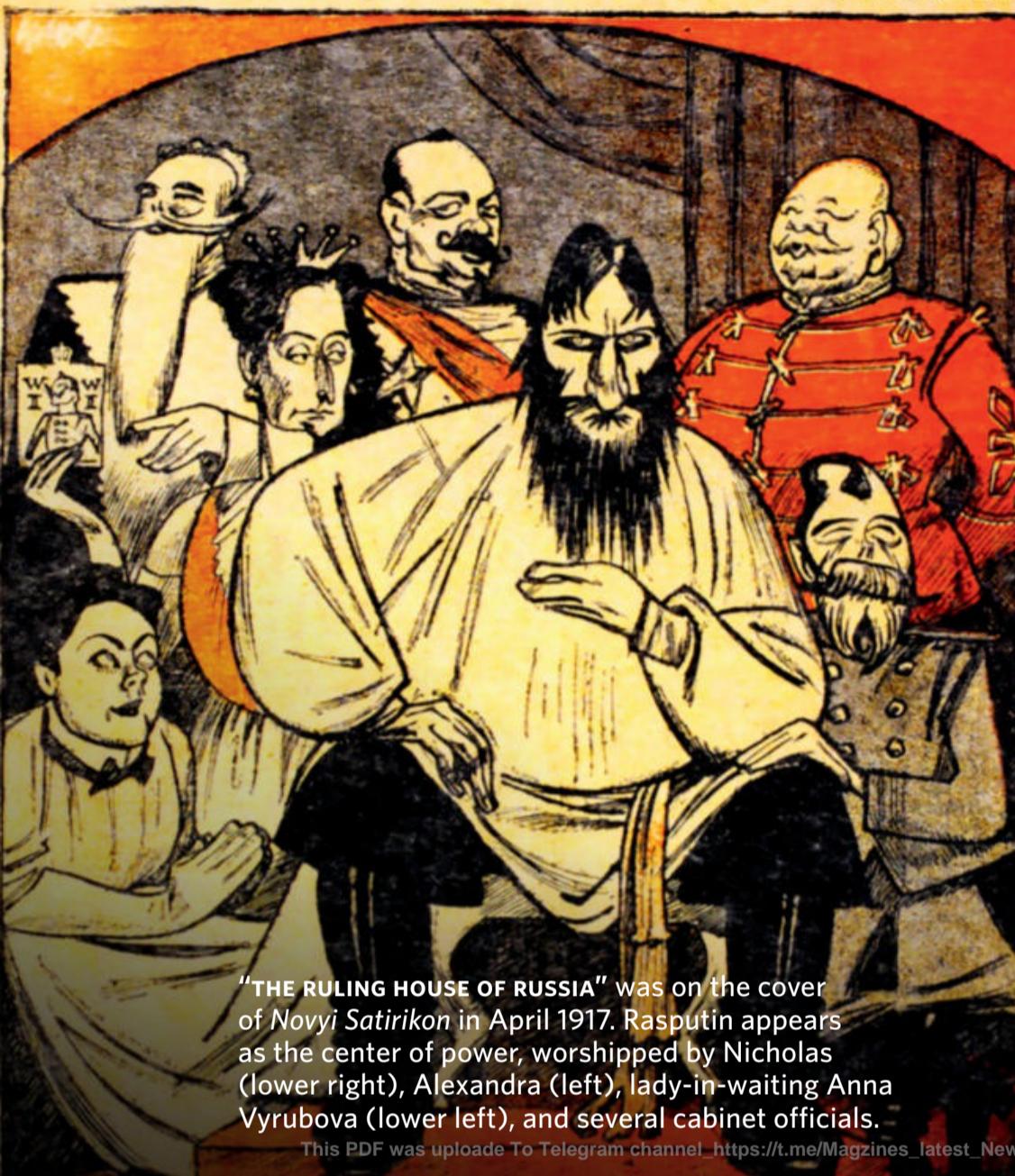
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Rasputin now had his own personal chauffeur to take him out to Tsarskoye Selo for private prayer meetings with the tsarina.

Gossip about their relationship took an ugly turn. Concern grew within the Romanovs that Alexandra was leading the family into disrepute. Lurid rumors flew that her relationship with Rasputin had become sexual, as pornographic images of them were circulated in St. Petersburg. Rasputin and Alexandra were talked of as dark forces who would bring Russia to ruin.

#### Danger to Russia

Rasputin had long been the target of death threats, and soon there were open and widespread calls for his removal—by whatever means necessary. After a knife attack by a woman in June 1914 left him with a near-fatal stomach wound, he was accompanied everywhere by a police agent. No one could get close enough to kill him because Rasputin was always carefully guarded.



"THE RULING HOUSE OF RUSSIA" was on the cover of *Novyi Satirikon* in April 1917. Rasputin appears as the center of power, worshipped by Nicholas (lower right), Alexandra (left), lady-in-waiting Anna Vyrubova (lower left), and several cabinet officials.

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RASPUTIN LASCIVIOUSLY CUPS the tsarina's breast on a 1917 postcard. Below them is the word *samoderzhavie*, which means "autocracy" in Russian but serves as a pun here to show Rasputin as a master manipulator of Alexandra and the imperial throne.

#### LADY OF INFLUENCE

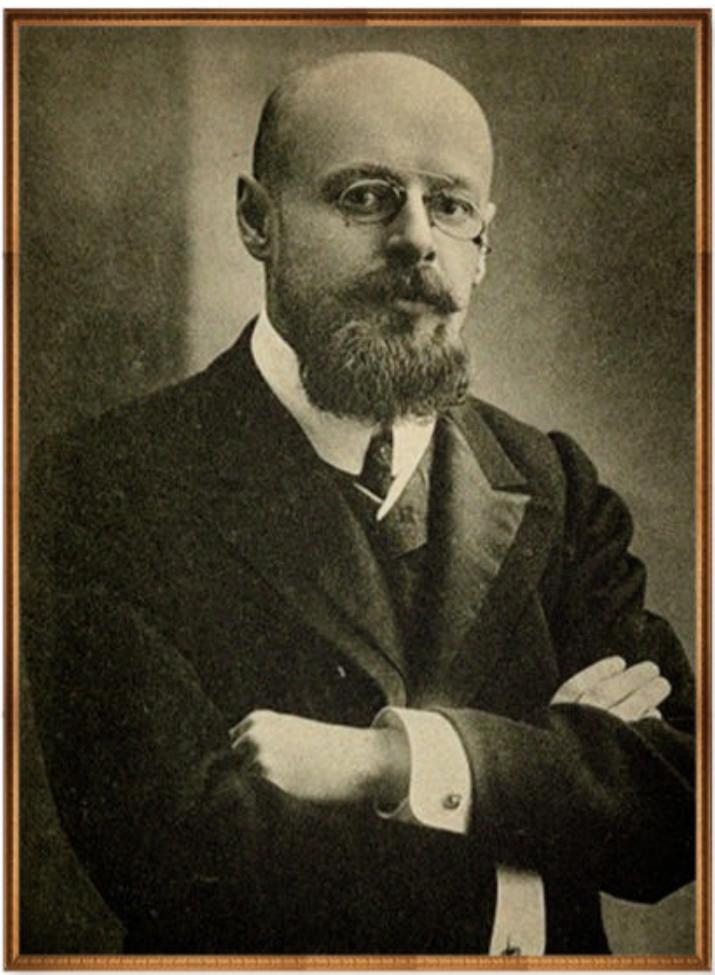
## ANNA AND ALEXANDRA

**A**nna Vyrubova was another lightning rod for controversy for Empress Alexandra. Twelve years her junior, Anna was summoned to court in 1905 as a lady-in-waiting and soon became one of the empress's closest confidants. Utterly devoted to the empress, Anna was part of the imperial family's inner circle. Like many other upper-class women in Russia, Anna was a devotee of Rasputin, who had prophesized the end of her marriage in 1907. Awed by his abilities, Anna passionately believed the holy man could help Alexandra and her hemophiliac son. She helped facilitate a link between the empress and Rasputin, for which she would draw the ire of Russia's elite.



Tsarina Alexandra (left) sits alongside Anna Vyrubova in an undated photograph.

GETTY IMAGES



### PLOTTER AND POLITICIAN

Vladimir Purishkevich (left) was a monarchist and anti-Semite who saw Rasputin as a danger to Russia.

FINE ART/ALBUM

### FAMILY PORTRAIT

Marrying into the royal family, Prince Felix Yusupov (right) wed Nicholas's niece Irina (far right). Their only child, also called Irina, was born in March 1915.

AKG/ALBUM

### THE POLISH DOCTOR

Stanislav Lazovert (below) allegedly poisoned the cakes served to Rasputin.

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A Polish doctor, Lazovert had met Vladimir Purishkevich during World War I and was recruited into the plot.

ROGER-VIOLLET/AURIMAGES



Rasputin's alleged influence over the tsarina generated serious concerns among several senior members of the Romanov family. They tacitly encouraged a murder plot hatched by a young, impetuous, and inexperienced 29-year-old: Prince Felix Yusupov.

Born into one of Russia's wealthiest families and married to Nicholas II's niece Irina, Yusupov considered it his patriotic duty to rid Russia of Rasputin. With Rasputin out of the picture, Yusupov hoped to restore the reputation of the tsar, as well as help Nicholas rely more on his extended family, the nobility, and the Duma.

In October 1916 Yusupov inveigled his friend (and Tsar Nicholas's cousin), 25-year-old

Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, into planning the murder with him. At the end of November, they had recruited Vladimir Purishkevich, a member of the Russian State Duma who had already openly lambasted Rasputin. Two others were taken on to assist in the final plan: a Life Guards officer, Lieutenant Sergei Sukhotin, and a Polish doctor, Stanislav Lazovert, who was to help with administering the poison—potassium cyanide crystals—which Yusupov had obtained.

### Murder of the Monk

The best known account of the events of December 16–17, 1916, comes from Yusupov's own writings published some 10 years after Rasputin's death. In *La Fin de Raspoutine* (and later in his memoirs, *Lost Splendor*, that followed in the 1950s) Yusupov lays out the assassination plans from start to finish. To begin, Yusupov had already made Rasputin's acquaintance in the preceding weeks by consulting him a few times about health problems.

The Yusupov family owned a palace on St. Petersburg's Moika Canal, which was chosen as the location for the murder. Yusupov would invite Rasputin to the Moika to meet his wife, the beautiful Princess Irina. To conceal the visit and elude his security detail, Rasputin would arrive very late on December 16.

Yusupov had prepared a small basement room to receive Rasputin. Dimly lit with colored lanterns and a blazing open fire, the room was richly arranged with works of art and curios, carved oak chairs, cabinets of ebony, a



RUSSIA'S RICHEST MAN?

## FROM PLAYBOY TO ASSASSIN

Raised in the lap of luxury, Prince Felix Yusupov enjoyed throwing wild parties, smoking and drinking, and having love affairs with men and women. After his older brother's death in 1908, Felix became the heir to the family fortune: palaces, estates, jewels, oil fields, coal and iron mines, factories, and mills. In terms of wealth, the Yusupovs were said to be second only to the Romanovs in Russia. But after Rasputin's murder in 1916 and the revolution that followed, Felix lost his fortune. Felix and his wife, Irina, were forced into exile, eventually settling in Paris, France, where they lived off their remaining assets. When those ran out, they turned to other means. In 1927 Felix used Rasputin's death for income when he published *La Fin de Raspoutine*, his account of the assassination plot. Nearly two decades later, Felix profited from his past again with his scandalous memoirs, *Lost Splendor*, that covered not only the infamous murder but also his decadent youth.

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Persian carpet, and a white bearskin rug. The table was set with a samovar for tea, biscuits, and fancy cakes—the kind that Yusupov said Rasputin liked. Before Rasputin's arrival, Sukhotin had ground the poison into a powder that Lazovert was said to have sprinkled inside the cakes. Yusupov had also given Pavlovich and Purishkevich a potassium cyanide solution to lace Rasputin's wine.

Just after midnight, Lazovert, disguised as a chauffeur, drove Yusupov to Rasputin's home at 64 Gorokhovaya Street. Rasputin's daughters recalled that he appeared in good spirits that night but also seemed highly nervous, as though he sensed something was amiss. Rasputin had dressed up for the occasion; he wore a silk shirt embroidered with cornflowers (specially made for him by the tsarina), velvet breeches, and polished boots. He had washed and combed his hair and, as Yusupov recalled, smelled of cheap soap.

Meanwhile Pavlovich and Purishkevich, who remained at the Moika Palace, made it

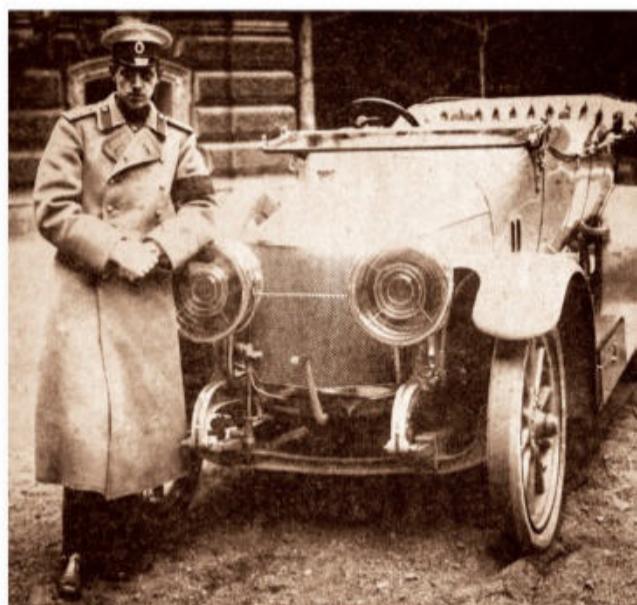
appear as if a party were going on upstairs. As Rasputin, Lazovert, and Yusupov entered the palace through a side entrance, they heard music playing on the phonograph upstairs. Two young women had also arrived. At some point, Rasputin believed, the lovely Irina would come down to meet him in the basement. (Irina had actually refused to be involved in the night's events and remained far away on the family estate in Crimea.)

Yusupov offered Rasputin the cakes. At first he refused, then reluctantly took one, then a second. Nothing happened. Yusupov could not understand why the poison had not worked. He then persuaded his guest to sample Madeira wine from his own Crimean vineyards, having managed surreptitiously to slip some poison into the glass. Rasputin drank the wine "like a connoisseur," then took some more, but still, mystifyingly, the poison had no effect.

### ROYAL ASSASSIN

Nicholas was extremely fond of his cousin Dmitri Pavlovich (below), whose involvement in Rasputin's murder was a heavy blow to the sovereign.

ALBUM



# IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH

**A**s soon as Rasputin entered the room, he took off his coat and began inspecting the furniture... I offered him wine and tea; to my disappointment, he refused both. Had something made him suspicious? I was determined, whatever happened, that he would not leave the house alive. We sat down at the table, and he began to talk... "It is clear my plain speaking annoys a lot of people. The aristocrats can't get used to the idea that a humble peasant should be welcome at the Imperial Palace... They are eaten up with envy and fury... but I'm not scared of them. They can't touch me. I'm protected against ill fortune. There have been attempts on my life but the Lord has always frustrated these plots. Disaster will befall anyone who moves against me." Rasputin's words echoed ominously through the room in which he was to die. But nothing could deter me now. While he talked, my one idea was to make him drink some wine and eat the cakes.

—Felix Yusupov's account of the night of Rasputin's death in his memoirs, *Lost Splendor*.



## SCENE OF THE CRIME

The Yusupov Palace sits along the Moika River in St. Petersburg. Today it is a museum with rooms dedicated to Rasputin's murder.

AGE FOTOSTOCK





### SETTING THE STAGE FOR MURDER

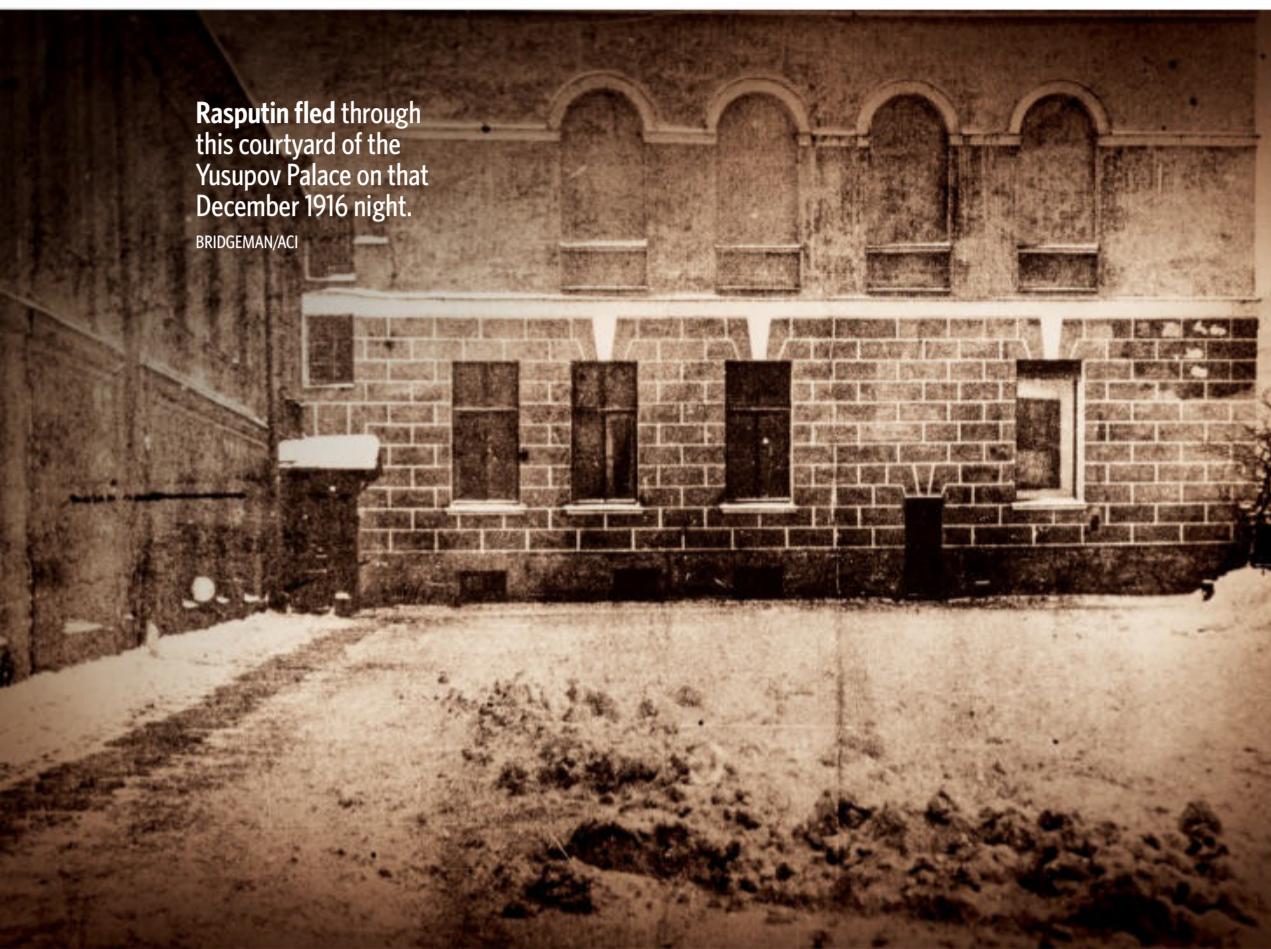
Waxwork figures of Yusupov (at left) and Rasputin in the basement room of the Yusupov Palace (now a museum) depict the murder plot. In his memoirs, Yusupov described how he carefully prepared the room and the cakes to avoid arousing Rasputin's suspicions.

DAVID SOUTH/ALAMY

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**Rasputin fled through this courtyard of the Yusupov Palace on that December 1916 night.**

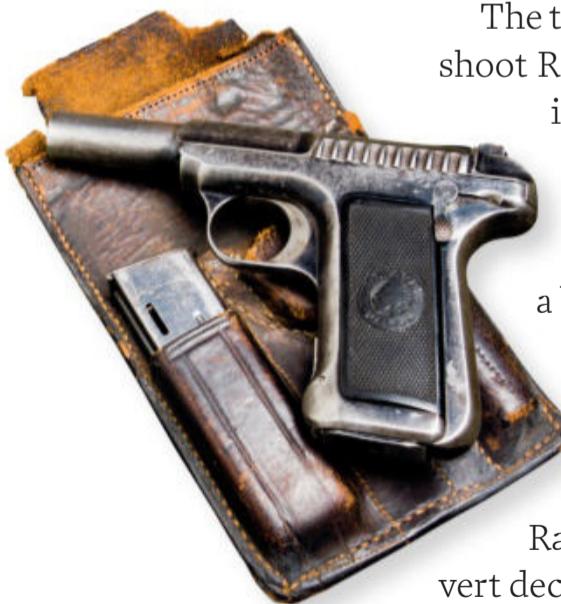
BRIDGEMAN/ACI



## TWO GUNS, TWO KILLERS

**According to the assassins' accounts, Yusupov shot Rasputin with a Browning pistol and Purishkevich shot him with a semiautomatic Savage pistol, like the one shown below.**

ALAMY/ACI



Things continued in this way for some time. Rasputin prevailed on Yusupov to entertain him with a guitar. He drank more tea, his head drooped, and his eyes closed. He awoke—but yet, more than two hours later, the poison had not done its work.

All this time Yusupov's co-conspirators were waiting upstairs. Eventually, an increasingly frantic Yusupov went to consult with them. Purishkevich recalled Yusupov frantically telling them that "the only effect that I can see of the poison is that he is constantly belching and that he dribbles a bit."

The trio resolved they had no option but to shoot Rasputin. Yusupov removed a Browning pistol from his writing desk and returned to the basement, where he found Rasputin breathing heavily and complaining of a heavy head and a burning sensation in his stomach. As Rasputin stood up, Yusupov raised his pistol and fired at him, hitting him in the side of the chest. Pavlovich and Purishkevich rushed down to see

Rasputin lying on the bearskin rug. Lazovert declared that Rasputin was dead, and the conspirators disappeared upstairs.

Yusupov was uneasy and went back down to double-check the body. As he drew close, Rasputin's eyes suddenly opened wide: "the green

eyes of a viper staring at me with an expression of diabolical hatred," he recalled.

Suddenly, with a superhuman effort, Rasputin lunged to his feet and rushed at Yusupov with an animalistic roar, trying to grab his throat. Despite the poison and the bullet in his chest, Rasputin seemed to find enormous strength but then crashed onto his back. Yusupov's account at this point strains credibility, ascribing demonic powers to the injured man.

Utterly terrified, Yusupov rushed upstairs for help, retching with fear. Purishkevich now assumed control. Cocking his Savage pistol, he went down to find that Rasputin had managed to get out through the side door into the snow-covered courtyard, staggering left in his agony. Purishkevich fired once and missed; then a second time—at a run—and again managed to miss. Despite his wound, Rasputin, crawling on his knees, reached the gate of the courtyard when Purishkevich fired a third time and hit him in the back. He then fired a fourth and fatal shot directly into Rasputin's forehead.





### CRIME AND ELEGANCE

On December 16, 1916, Yusupov carefully prepared this basement room in his palace, arranging it to showcase his wealth and good taste to help distract his victim.

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#### CHILDREN OF THE 'MAD MONK'

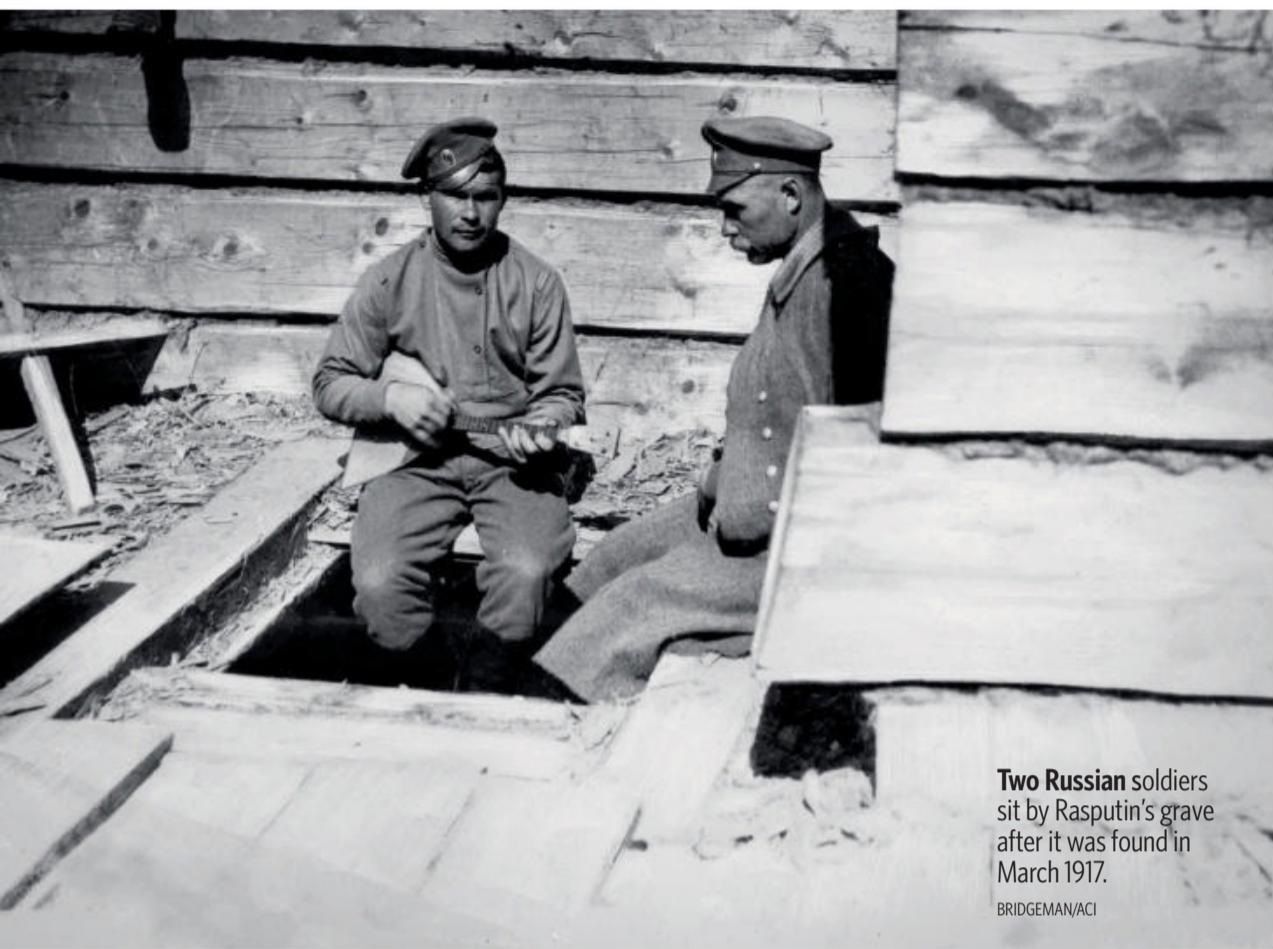
## RASPUTIN'S CHILDREN

Rasputin's two teenage daughters, Maria and Varvara, lived with him in St. Petersburg. In December 1916, rumors of death threats against their father had reached them. When they saw him getting ready to go out on the 16th, they hid his galoshes to try to keep him safe at home, but he found them and met his fate that night. After his murder, Maria and Varvara lived with their mother, but the girls' ties to the Romanovs endangered them. Maria fled Russia for continental Europe, while Varvara remained behind and died in 1924. Touring across Europe, Maria worked as a dancer and circus performer before immigrating to the United States in 1937. She lived there until her death in September 1977.



Photographed in 1911, Rasputin's eldest daughter Maria (far right) sits next to her father and one of his followers. Maria escaped Russia after her father's death, eventually settling in the United States in 1937.

GETTY IMAGES



**Two Russian** soldiers sit by Rasputin's grave after it was found in March 1917.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

# LEAVE NO TRACE

After the February revolution, the provisional government ordered Rasputin's body to be burned. The order appears in this document dated March 11, 1917, a few days after the discovery of his grave.

GETTY IMAGES

Pavlovich, Sukhotin, and Lazovert then disposed of Rasputin's body. They wrapped it in a heavy cloth and tied it with rope. They dragged it into Pavlovich's car and drove to the Large Petrovsky Bridge by the Neva, where they threw the body through the broken ice. They drove home just as dawn was breaking.

Rumors of Rasputin's disappearance and probable murder began to circulate rapidly in St. Petersburg. At the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoye Selo, the tsarina waited anxiously for news.

while the police initiated a search. On December 19 Rasputin's body—his arms frozen over his head in an eerie gesture—was found by the river police near Krestovsky Island. When the news got out, the public rejoiced on the streets, said prayers of thanks in church, and lit candles in front of the icons. Yusupov and Pavlovich were feted as national heroes.

Rasputin's remains were taken in a Red Cross van to a home for army veterans. On Nicholas II's specific instructions, an autopsy was conducted on the still frozen body that evening. A doctor named Dmitry Kosorotov ascertained that Rasputin had been shot three times by different caliber revolvers: once in the left side of the chest, another in the

back, and the fatal shot—fired at point-blank range, possibly from a .455 Webley revolver—in the head. There were no traces of poison found in the body, only alcohol.

For more than 100 years Yusupov's account has been the accepted source on Rasputin's murder, though many have expressed reservations about its accuracy. One of the biggest points of contention is whether the cakes had indeed been poisoned. Not long before his death, Lazovert said that he had second thoughts about poisoning Rasputin and had substituted something harmless for the cyanide. Yusupov's dramatic telling of the night's events, accurate or not, has become stuck in the public imagination.

## Aftermath

It is said that Tsarina Alexandra retrieved the embroidered shirt that Rasputin had been wearing and treasured it as a religious talisman. After the autopsy, Rasputin's body was prepared for burial and laid out with an icon from the imperial family on his breast. At midnight on



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December 21, Rasputin's zinc coffin was taken to Alexander Park at Tsarskoye Selo, where it was secretly buried in the presence of Nicholas, Alexandra, and a few others, on the site of a new chapel that was being built there.

Authorities quickly caught the conspirators and placed them under house arrest. As punishment, the tsar exiled Yusupov to a family estate in Belgorod Oblast. Grand Duke Dmitry was banished from court and sent to fight on the Persian front. Dmitry's punishment drew heated opposition from the Romanov family, but the decision probably saved his life. When the tsarist autocracy collapsed after the February 1917 revolution, Dmitry was a long way from danger.

The conspirators claimed to have killed Rasputin to save the Russian throne, but it seems their actions did little to help the monarchy in the long term. Tensions caused by World War I and domestic turmoil boiled over a few months after Rasputin's death. After the revolution of 1917, Nicholas II abdicated, ending three

centuries of Romanov rule. Nicholas, Alexandra, and their children were imprisoned by Russia's provisional government and exiled, first to Siberia and then to Yekaterinburg. The entire family would be murdered there in July 1918.

In early March 1917, Rasputin's resting place was discovered at Tsarskoye Selo. The provisional government feared his grave could serve as a potential pilgrimage site and ordered it destroyed. The coffin was dug up in secret, and Rasputin's remains were burned. For the Russian public, fueled by their irrational and deep-seated hatred of him, it was a fitting end. ■

DR. HELEN RAPPAPORT IS A NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN SPECIALIZING IN LATE IMPERIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA.

#### *Learn more*

**Rasputin: Faith, Power, and the Twilight of the Romanovs**  
Douglas Smith, Picador, 2017

**Caught in the Revolution:  
Petrograd, Russia, 1917—A World on the Edge**  
Helen Rappaport, St. Martin's Press, 2017

#### **RECOVERED FROM THE NEVA**

Rasputin's battered body was pulled from the Neva River a few days after his murder. According to the autopsy, he was shot three times: in the chest, in the back, and in the head.

GETTY IMAGES

# RUSSIA'S GREATEST LOVE MACHINE?

Pop culture embraced Rasputin's scandalous reputation, turning him into a supervillain.

**I**t is safe to say that Grigory Rasputin had a bad reputation when he was alive. Tales of his licentious behavior spread far and wide throughout Russia. His favor with Tsarina Alexandra sparked stories that she was his lover, a theory that lingered despite never being confirmed. While he lived, gossip thrived about his powers of healing, mind control, and seduction. After he died, immortality was added to that list, turning him into a legend.

Rasputin's reputation grew bigger and badder after his death in

1916, thanks to his murderers—most notably Felix Yusupov. His books describe Rasputin as almost superhuman in the face of death. Poison failed to kill him. A bullet stopped his heart for a moment before he sprang back to life and attacked Yusupov: "This devil who was dying of poison, who had a bullet in his heart, must have been raised from the dead by the powers of evil. There was something appalling and monstrous in his diabolical refusal to die."

Yusupov's memoirs paint a picture of an impervious supervillain with sorcery and strength at his command. It is this caricature of Rasputin that has taken on a life of its own—on stage and screen, as well as in music. One of the earliest depictions of Rasputin in film is 1932's *Rasputin and the Empress*. It



**RASPUTIN AND THE EMPRESS, 1932**

**Bedeviled by controversy, Richard Boleslawski's take on Rasputin's life triggered costly legal action by Prince Yusupov.** UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/GETTY

stars Lionel Barrymore as the Russian mystic, Ethel Barrymore as the tsarina, and John Barrymore as Prince Chegodieff, a stand-in for Yusupov determined to kill the monk to save Russia (and his wife, Princess Natasha, who was modeled on Yusupov's wife, Irina) from succumbing to his hypnotic powers. Using his powers of fascination and magic, Rasputin puts the tsarina's son under a spell and pulls her under his influence.

The film is remembered more today for being the reason the disclaimer "any similarity to any person living or dead is purely coincidental" exists. The Yusupovs successfully sued MGM for libel and invasion of privacy based on the film's implication that Rasputin sexually assaults the Irina-based

## PRINCESS NATASHA & RASPUTIN

*Rasputin and the Empress* depicted fictional Princess Natasha (played by Diana Wynyard and based on Yusupov's wife, Irina) in thrall to Lionel Barrymore's Rasputin.

ALAMY



# RASPUTIN -THE MAD MONK

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Starring CHRISTOPHER LEE  
BARBARA SHELLEY · RICHARD PASCO  
also starring FRANCIS MATTHEWS · SUZAN FARMER  
DINSDALE LANDEN and RENEE ASHERSON  
CINEMASCOPE TECHNICOLOR

## ► THE MAD MONK, 1966

The poster for Don Sharp's Hammer horror classic sets the tone. HAMMER FILMS/RGR COLLECTION/ALAMY



## ▲ NIGHTS OF RASPUTIN, 1962

Pierre Chenal's French-Italian offering ramped up the mystic's seductive appeal. PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY

## ▼ 'RASPUTIN,' BONEY M., 1978

Ra-Ra-Rasputin  
met disco and  
conquered dance  
floors everywhere.

ALAMY



character. The case was settled out of court for about \$250,000 (nearly six million dollars today), which the Yusupovs lived on for quite some time.

In the 1960s Rasputin's seductive powers had become a defining trait in his pop culture depictions. Promotional posters for *Nights of Rasputin* boldly promised: "Women Hungrily

Sought His Embraces as He Taught Them Salvation Through Sin!" British actor Christopher Lee starred in 1966's *Rasputin: The Mad Monk*, whose posters asked: "What mystic power did this man possess that turned men into killers—and women into animals!"

In 1978 Rasputin's reputation as a lady's man took a musical turn when

funk and disco group Boney M. released "Rasputin." In an earworm of a chorus, he's called "lover of the Russian queen" and "Russia's greatest love machine." Each verse details another chapter in Rasputin's life, starting with his faith healing and ending with his gruesome murder, all set to a very danceable beat.

# The Lost Capital of Ancient Assyria

Once overlooked by archaeologists, Assur has emerged as a city of great spiritual and political importance in the Assyrian Empire.

**T**he key to understanding the ancient city of Assur (also known as Ashur) to Assyrian civilization lies in its name. Assur was the most revered god in Assyria, whose name means “land of Assur.” In the early days of the Assyrian Empire, Assur was its first capital and the origin of its ruling dynasty.

Sited on a crag on the western shore of the Tigris River in what is now Iraq, Assur acted as a vital link for trade between Assyria and Anatolia, today’s eastern Turkey. At its peak, around 900 to 600 B.C., Assyria attained the greatest level of military power and bureaucratic organization the world had yet seen.

Later, in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–609 B.C.), Assur’s political influence was declining. It was replaced in 879 B.C. by a new capital, Kalhu, known today as Nimrud.



In the seventh century B.C., the Assyrian kingdom was conquered by the Medes and Babylonians. Assur endured for another millennium, occupied in turn by the Persian Empire and later the Parthians. After being sacked by the Sassanian Persians around A.D. 240, Assur was left in ruins.

## Overlooked

In recent centuries, local people knew the ruins of Assur, dominated by a once imposing ziggurat, had been a great city. The site, which today lies in Iraq and is known in

Arabic as Qalat Sherqat, was neglected by 19th-century archaeologists.

Despite its pivotal role economically and politically, Assur was less known than cities of equal importance in ancient Greece, Rome, or Egypt, and it was not one of the more familiar cities named in the Bible, such as Babylon or Nineveh. Two pioneers of Mesopotamian archaeology, Austen Henry Layard and Hormuzd Rassam, did briefly investigate the site, but they preferred to focus on the more biblically prominent sites of Nineveh and Nimrud.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the first systematic excavation of the site was undertaken. The German Orient Society, an archaeological association, took a strong interest in Mesopotamia. It sent a mission to

Babylon in 1899, led by Robert Koldewey. He would bring to light such famous monuments as Babylon’s regal Ishtar Gate. Shortly afterward,



**THE RUINS** of Assur, photographed in the 1930s, are still dominated today by the city’s great ziggurat.

MATSON PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## THE LOST CITY REVEALED

1850

Scholars Austen Henry Layard and Hormuzd Rassam investigate the Assur site.

1903–1914

Walter Andrae directs major digs at Assur until the outbreak of World War I.

1928

Assur artifacts, impounded in Portugal since the war, are brought by Andrae to Berlin.

2022

After decades of political turmoil, a new campaign of excavations begins at Assur.



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King Wilhelm II of Prussia, an archaeology enthusiast, reached an agreement with Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, leader of the Ottoman Empire, who controlled the site at the time. German archaeologists would be permitted to excavate Assur. Koldewey entrusted the mission to Walter Andrae.

#### Meticulous Methods

Born near Leipzig in 1875, Andrae trained as an architect. He joined Koldewey's team

in Babylon, where he put his draftsman skills to use. As Koldewey's disciple, he learned that the purpose of archaeology was not only to collect objects for display in museums. Above all, it was to understand how past societies functioned, which meant that every object and structure exhumed had to be accurately documented.

Koldewey's meticulous methods of planning stood

*Continued on page 94*

## ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

**WALTER ANDRAE'S** exceptional artistic skills made him invaluable on Robert Koldewey's excavations of Babylon in the early 1900s. While learning the meticulous archaeological methods that would later serve him in Assur, Andrae made drawings and paintings of the site almost daily. Methodical and scientific, Andrae also had a visionary side: In his memoirs, he wrote how, over many years, he formed in his mind an "inner vision ... a spiritual picture" of what life was like in those ancient cities.

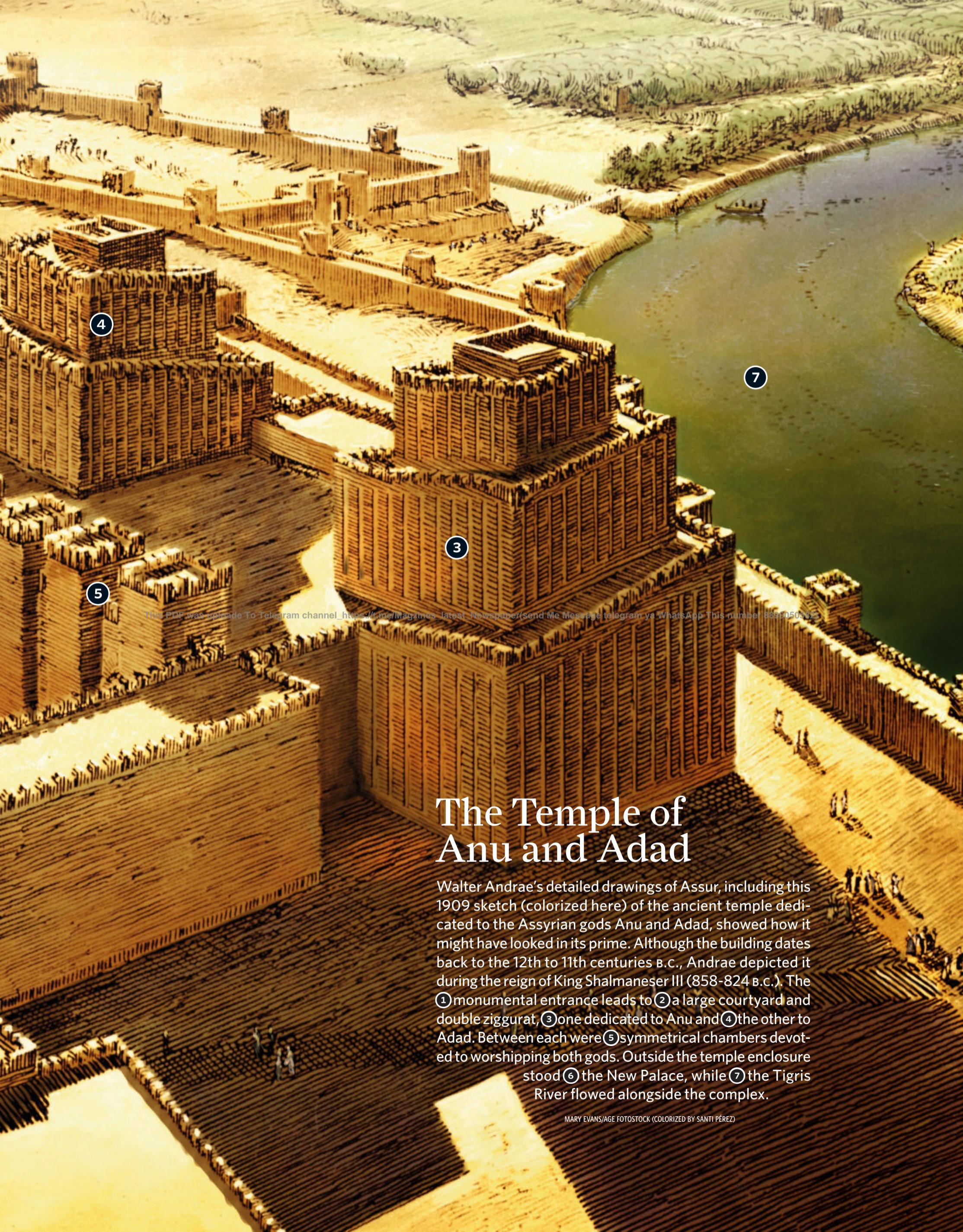
**Self-portrait** of the archaeologist Walter Andrae  
AGE FOTOSTOCK



**DISCOVERIES**



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## The Temple of Anu and Adad

Walter Andrae's detailed drawings of Assur, including this 1909 sketch (colorized here) of the ancient temple dedicated to the Assyrian gods Anu and Adad, showed how it might have looked in its prime. Although the building dates back to the 12th to 11th centuries B.C., Andrae depicted it during the reign of King Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.). The ①monumental entrance leads to ②a large courtyard and double ziggurat, ③one dedicated to Anu and ④the other to Adad. Between each were ⑤symmetrical chambers devoted to worshipping both gods. Outside the temple enclosure stood ⑥the New Palace, while ⑦the Tigris River flowed alongside the complex.

MARY EVANS/AGE FOTOSTOCK (COLORIZED BY SANTI PÉREZ)

# Treasures of Assur

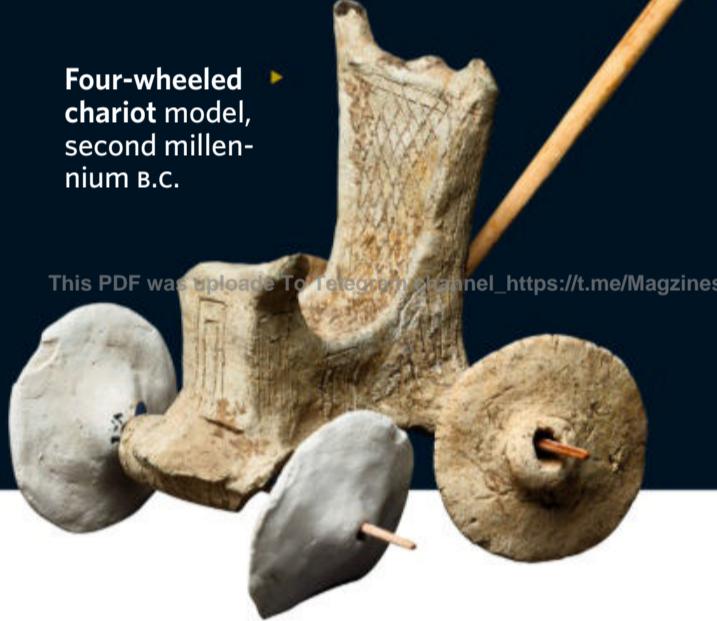
**GERMANY'S MUSEUM OF THE NEAR EAST** (Vorderasiatisches Museum) in Berlin holds numerous objects collected during Andrae's digs in Assur.

ALL IMAGES: BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

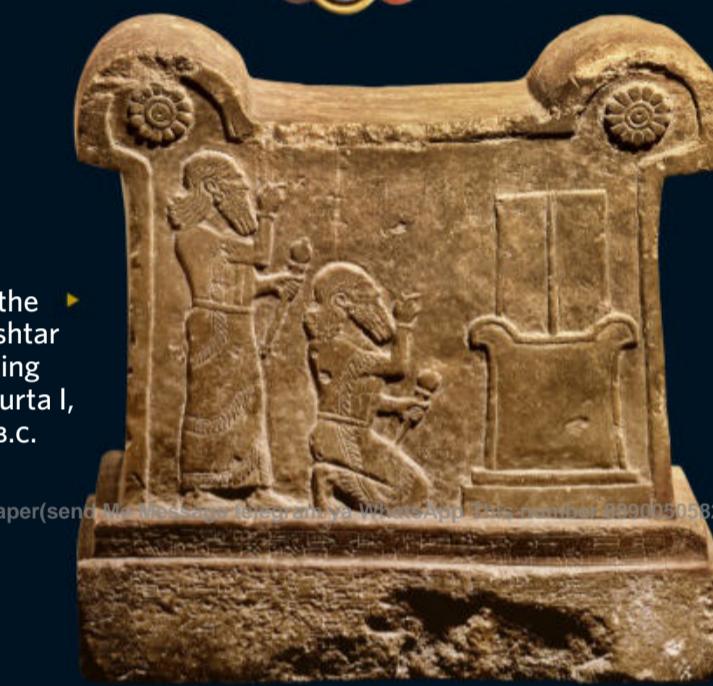


► **Glazed pottery fragment** found in 1908, eighth-seventh centuries B.C.

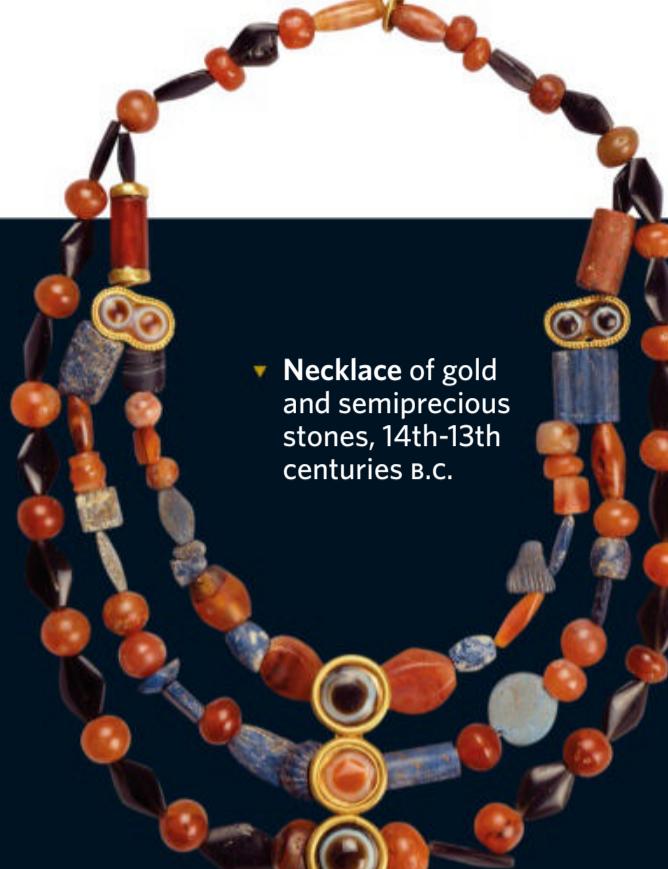
Four-wheeled chariot model, second millennium B.C.



► **Altar** from the temple of Ishtar depicting King Tukulti-Ninurta I, circa 1220 B.C.



▼ **Necklace** of gold and semiprecious stones, 14th-13th centuries B.C.



Andrae in good stead when he began his work at Assur in 1903. In the nine years that followed, he and his team of 180 workers managed to dig down to the oldest settlement strata, the power center of the Assyrian state. They uncovered a complex of temples, palaces, and fortifications.

The city's temple to the god Assur stood high on a rocky spur to the northeast. The lavishly decorated mud-brick building was completed around 1800 B.C. It had three courtyards, plus rooms and chapels dedicated to other divinities. In one hard-to-access chamber, archaeologists found the god's room with his statue. According to an inscription by later sovereign

Esarhaddon, the walls were once covered with gold.

Written in cuneiform on clay tablets, texts found at the site documented several royal palaces in Assur. Andrae and his team identified and excavated the two principal Assyrian-era palaces: the Old Palace, with ancient foundations embellished by Assur's kings as the city became a regional power; and the

New Palace, built in the 13th century B.C. by Tukulti-Ninurta I. A third palace excavated by Andrae was built much later by the Parthians in the second century A.D.

In 1912 Andrae and his team made an exceptional discovery inside the Old Palace: large hypogea, underground chambers accessed from the palace by a staircase. These were the royal tombs of Assur, where Assyria's ancient kings were laid to rest.

The tombs consisted of a large underground chamber where a huge sarcophagus was placed, sealed with a slab. Much of the hypogea, like the city as a whole, had been looted



**The Assyrians and their capital were named for Assur, father of the gods and protector of the king.**

**The god Assur.** A relief from the Temple of Assur, circa 2000-1500 B.C.  
AKG/ALBUM

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# THE SPACE RACE

## THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE FIRST BLACK ASTRONAUTS

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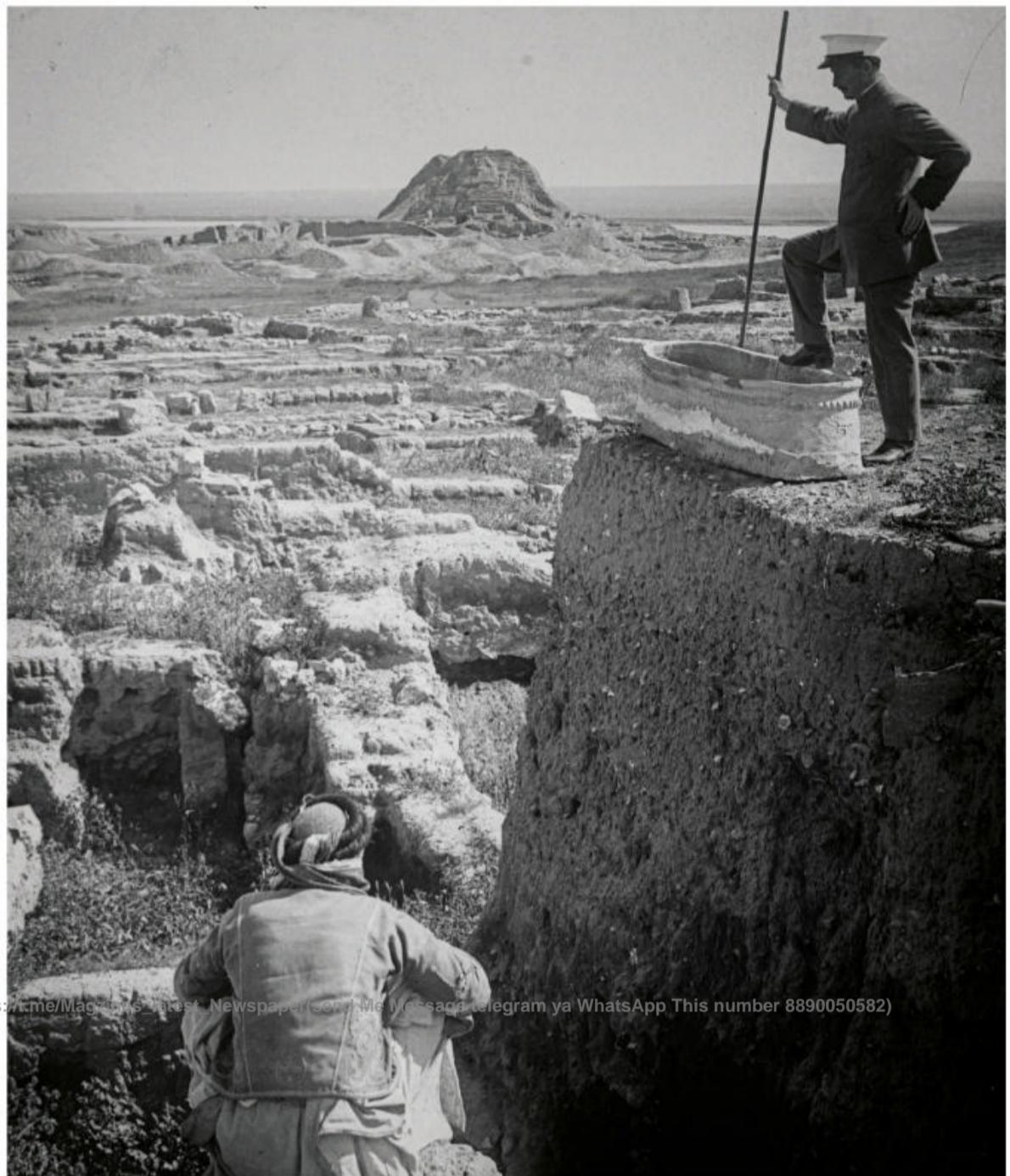
## RETURN TO MESOPOTAMIA

**ANDRAE WAS DRAFTED** into the German armed forces to serve in World War I. In 1914 he first saw action in the trenches of the western front. He was reassigned to more familiar territory, where he had worked as an archaeologist at Syrian and Mesopotamian sites. During his time in Baghdad, he sailed up the Euphrates and visited Nineveh and Assur. The war gave him the chance to create his most highly regarded works of art: Andrae made landscapes of Iraq that captured the essence and light of the lands. After Baghdad, he took part in a campaign in Persia, and in 1918, finally, he was stationed in the Holy Land.

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**Ruins of Assur** in 1914, as seen by a German archaeologist, possibly Andrae

DAGLI ORTI/AURIMAGES



by the Medes in 614 B.C. when the Neo-Assyrian kingdom fell. Any gold or valuable grave goods were long gone.

### Modern Threats

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 brought Andrae's work in Assur to a halt. In the 1920s, as director of the Museum of the Near East in Berlin, Andrae was tasked with recovering and cataloging artifacts from Assur. These had been assigned to Germany in an agreement with the Ottomans. In 1914 the Germany-bound ship carrying the items stopped in Portugal.

Although the Portuguese government was officially neutral at the start of World

War I, the ship's cargo was seized and held until 1926, when Andrae brought the items to Berlin and began this important work.

Assur remained unexplored for decades. In 1978 new inquiries were begun, but political upheavals in Iraq, the state that controlled the site, stymied many efforts after 1989.

The following years would see a series of ups and downs for the site. In 2003 the ancient city became a UNESCO World Heritage site. In 2015, ISIS deliberately destroyed Assur's remains, including severely damaging the arches of a historic symbol of the city, the monumental Tabira Gate.

In early 2022, a team from Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, arrived at Assur to begin an ambitious program of restoration and investigation. Headed by LMU's Karen Radner and Janoscha Kreppner of Münster University, the group has carried out a magnetometric survey to record Assur's features.

The excavations will focus on Assur's New Town, built in the ninth century B.C. "Part of what makes New Town so interesting is that the most recent results show that it existed in the mid-second millennium B.C. before Assur was the capital of a major regional power," Radner explained.

Today, a new threat to the site looms in the form of a public works project. Situated 25 miles from Assur, the proposed Makhoul Dam could drown Assyria's ancient capital. While Assur's future lies in the balance, the team is still at work.

"We're gathering a lot of samples: charcoal, human teeth, animal bones, and paleobotanical specimens. They are currently being analyzed. The results will help develop a more exact picture of the lives of people in Assur from the mid-second millennium B.C. to the 7th century A.D. than has ever been possible."

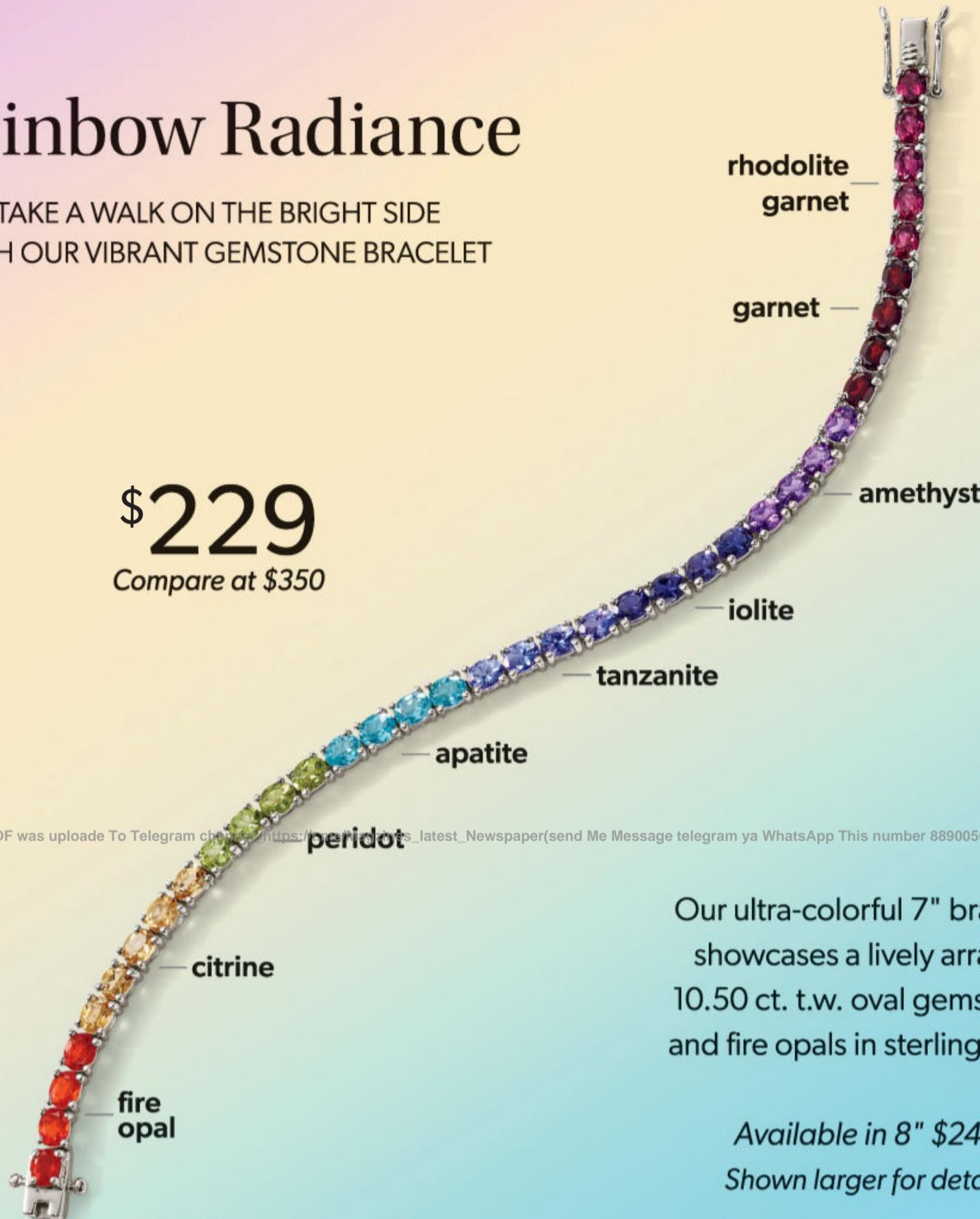
—Alejandro Gallego

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EPIC TALE, MINIATURE SCALE

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